UNIVERSITY OF BATH

Girls' education and language of instruction: An extended policy brief

IPR Policy Brief

Edited by Dr Lizzi O. Milligan and Dr Laela Adamson

May 2022

IPR Institute for Policy Research

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

Economic and Social Research Council

Girls' Education Challenge

UKaid from the British people

Contents

Foreword

Rona Bronwin, Education Advisor, Girls Education Department, UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office

This extended policy brief is a fascinating and important read, with so much depth drawing out the different experiences *within* contexts, but also drawing out some of the shared challenges and recommendations that exist across a wide range of contexts in Sub Saharan Africa, and that need more attention and thought. I think this work will be particularly timely and helpful to:

- **(re) Highlight the role of gender and inequality in education opportunities and outcomes to ensure a relentless focus on the experiences of the most marginalised and how they can be best supported (including with language and foundational learning acquisition).**
- **Draw attention to the role of language acquisition as an essential precursor to gaining foundational skills and therefore the need for Language of Instruction (LoI) to be proactively considered (and pragmatically planned for) as part of effective interventions that aim to build foundational literacy and numeracy and improve transitions at key points in primary and secondary.**
- **Introduce the opportunity to ensure that the momentum being built around foundational learning – and interventions to improve instruction - are underpinned by an understanding of gender and inequality, in order to build effective interactions in the classroom that enable teachers to improve children's language and foundational skills in a gender transformative way.**

Executive summary

Putting language of instruction on the girls' education agenda

The aspiration to ensure that girls can access, continue in, and benefit from, education is a global priority and part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals[1]. At the same time, though largely separately from the consideration of challenges faced by girls in education, global institutions are increasingly taking a public stance on the importance of language-of-instruction (LoI) policy for inclusive, quality education, asserting that learners should be taught using a language they understand[2]. With evidence from Rwanda, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Egypt, this policy brief demonstrates that these two issues cannot continue to be considered separately. Rather, LoI must be considered as a policy priority if we are to enable all girls to access and progress in quality, equitable education.

Although the LoI policies differ across the countries included in this policy brief, the introduction of an unfamiliar LoI is consistently shown to be a barrier to learning. This is supported by a broad evidence base from across Sub-Saharan Africa, where the World Bank have estimated that as many as 80% of learners do not have access to learning in a language they know best[3]. In most of the contributions to this policy brief the unfamiliar language is English. Those focused on Somalia and Tanzania also highlight the struggles faced by girls who attend primary schooling where the LoI is a national language but is not their own home language. In this policy brief we bring together quantitative and qualitative evidence, personal reflections, think-pieces, spotlight case-studies and girls' narratives to provide a range of compelling examples demonstrating how language exacerbates learning inequalities. However, they also raise additional questions, highlighting how much more research is needed and how much more we need to know. Contributions address the issue of LoI at primary and secondary schooling, alongside considerations as well of out-of-school alternative education programmes, demonstrating that LoI should be a priority for educational stakeholders at all stages and forms of teaching provision.

We do not argue that LoI is an entirely gendered issue. Boys also struggle with learning in a language that they do not understand well. However, the contributions to this policy brief clearly show that issues related to an unfamiliar LoI compound existing challenges and barriers to

---

[1] United Nations. 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, New York: United Nations. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

[2] UNESCO. 2016. *If you don't understand, how can you learn?* Policy Paper 24 of Global Education Monitoring Report, Paris: UNESCO. https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/if-you-don%E2%80%99t-understand-how-can-you-learn

World Bank. 2021. *Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/517851626203470278/pdf/Loud-and-Clear-Effective-Language-of-Instruction-Policies-For-Learning.pdf

[3] World Bank. 2021. *Loud and Clear., p. 9.*

For more of the evidence about the detrimental effect of the use of an unfamiliar LoI on educational outcomes and experiences:

Ouane, A. and Glanz, C. 2011. *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor. A Review and Analysis of Theory and Practice in Mother-Tongue and Bilingual Education in sub-Saharan Africa*, Hamburg and Tunis Belvédère: UIL and ADEA. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000212602

education, which burden some girls more than others[4]. Language is a key factor that can either support, or hinder, attempts to achieve equitable inclusion in education. Prioritisation of issues relating to language-in-education is, thus, vital if we want to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5.

The research reported in this policy brief includes examples from 2012 – 2021. We write this at the two-year point in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which has led to significant school closures and unequal access to out-of-school learning in all the countries discussed in this policy brief. International research has found that one impact of the pandemic and school closures has been to exacerbate existing inequalities in education[5]. Estimates by UNESCO suggest that 11 million girls world-wide are at risk of not returning to school[6]. The impact of this disruption to children's schooling is not a distinct feature of the analysis of any of the contributions. However, based on the evidence discussed here, we would suggest that the added burden of learning in an unfamiliar language may have exacerbated the impact. For example, for those who have returned to school, limited exposure to the LoI in home and community environments could be assumed to have contributed to learning loss.

Key finding one: An unfamiliar LoI affects some girls more than others

The evidence presented across this policy brief clearly demonstrates that low proficiency in the LoI is consistently associated with girls' poor attendance, lower learning outcomes, lower transition rates and higher risk of drop-out from schooling[7]. Furthermore, it is shown that these associations have a greater negative impact for some girls than others. The typologies developed by Milligan et al. (page 10) suggest that it is the girls most at risk of drop out and those at the tipping point of failure, who most struggle to engage with classroom content and practise English, the LoI in Rwanda. Similarly, Akyeampong et al. (page 42) show that girls are less likely to be able to break out of 'critically low' levels of performance than boys when learning in English as the LoI. Evidence from Tanzania (Sane, page 48) and Ethiopia (GEC spotlight, page 31) suggest a relationship specifically between an unfamiliar LoI and propensity to dropout from schooling altogether.

These girls who have been identified as struggling with low performance are also often girls without access to support with the unfamiliar LoI outside of school. Several contributions recognise the influence of home support on girls' outcomes. For example, Munyaneza and

---

[4] For more information about the range of barriers to girls' equitable opportunities in education, see:

Tao, S. 2018. ***UNICEF Think Piece Series: Gender and Equity***, Nairobi: UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office. https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org.esa/files/2018-09/EducationThinkPieces_1_GirlsEducation.pdf

UNESCO. 2020. ***Global Education Monitoring Report – Gender Report. A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education***, Paris: UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374514

Unterhalter E., North A., Arnot M., Lloyd C., Moletsane L., Murphy-Graham E., Parkes J. and Saito M. 2014. ***Interventions to enhance girls' education and gender equality. Education Rigorous Literature Review***, London: Department for International Development.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a089bae5274a31e0000230/Girls_Education_Literature_Review_2014_Unterhalter.pdf

[5] Meink, S., Fraillon, J. and Strietholt, R., 2022. ***The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education: International evidence from the Responses to Educational Disruption Survey (REDS)***, Paris and Amsterdam: UNESCO and International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380398

UNESCO, 2021. *#HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis; the latest facts on gender equality in education*, Paris: UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375707

World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021. *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery*, Washington D.C., Paris, New York: World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/416991638768297704/pdf/The-State-of-the-Global-Education-Crisis-A-Path-to-Recovery.pdf

[6] UNESCO, 2020. UNESCO COVID-19 education response: how many students are at risk of not returning to school? Paris: UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373992

[7] We use 'language proficiency' as a broad term but recognise it to be a crude measure. Students' language abilities are captured differently across the different contributions to this report.

Mugiraneza (page 20) found that, in the first three years of primary education in Rwanda, there is a high correlation between parents' capacity to support girls and their performance. In Kenya (GEC spotlight, page 36), an association was observed between the ability of girls with disabilities to speak English, the LoI, and their parents' interest in their education.

Although these findings highlight the struggles faced by low-achieving and marginalised girls, it is important to note that an unfamiliar LoI still acts as a limiting factor in high achieving contexts. A clear example of this is the 'schools of excellence' in Rwanda, where Kwok (page 21) identifies LoI as a barrier to sustained group discussion in line with expectations for the competence-based curriculum.

Key finding two: Importance of classroom practice and the role of teacher

It has been widely noted in the LoI literature that learning in an unfamiliar language necessitates the dual-purpose for teachers of building both subject knowledge and language skills[8]. Here, we see that teachers play an integral role in enabling and/or constraining girls' learning opportunities, specifically in relation to language. There are examples from Adamson (page 39), Milligan et al. (page 10) and Akyeampong et al. (page 42) that suggest that one way teachers constrain opportunities is through the silencing of many girls in their classroom. This is often by explicitly calling on only the highest achieving girls, and by assuming that proficiency in the LoI acts as a proxy for academic ability. This leads to a perpetuating cycle with some having opportunities to practise and further develop their language ability, while others remain silent. Salama (page 50) reflects on how this silence is enacted in specifically gendered ways. Dorimana and Uwizemariya (page 10) also reflect on how traditional, teacher-centred pedagogies limited their own opportunities for participation in the classroom and note how this has changed little between their own schooling and the current experiences of girls with whom they conducted research. For many of the girls discussed in this collection, it is also clear that the classroom is the main, or even only, space where they could practise the unfamiliar language. Without opportunities to speak in the classroom, their marginalisation from both language development and the subject content learning in that language is compounded.

It is clear from the contributions that the current system demands that teachers shoulder a great deal of responsibility for facilitating language development and subject learning, while doing so in equitable and gender-responsive ways. Yet it is also evident that they are often ill-equipped and unsupported to do so. Subject teacher education rarely includes specific training for supporting students to develop language skills, something that led the SOMGEP-T Somalia project (GEC spotlight, page 34) to develop a multi-layered approach to teacher training. Moreover, teachers themselves may be limited by their own proficiency in the official LoI, and in some contexts may not even share a home language with their students (Ethiopia GEC spotlight, page 31).

By focusing on the importance of the classroom and the teacher here, we do not wish to take away from the individual agency of girls. There is also evidence from different contexts that girls are drawing on a range of their own adaptation strategies to 'get by' in an unfamiliar LoI; Gloria's story (page 15) is a clear example of a girl demonstrating remarkable tenacity.

---

[8] For example: Barrett, A. M. and Bainton, D. 2016. Re-interpreting relevant learning: an evaluative framework for secondary education in a global language. *Comparative Education,* 52(3), pp. 392-407. https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/99041302/Barrett_Bainton_2016_author_s_version_post_print.pdf

Msimanga, A. and Lelliott, A. 2014. Talking Science in Multilingual Contexts in South Africa: Possibilities and challenges for engagement in learners home languages in high school classrooms. International Journal of Science Education, 36 (7), pp. 1159-83. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258629478_Talking_Science_in_Multilingual_Contexts_in_South_Africa_Possibilities_and_challenges_for_engagement_in_learners_home_languages_in_high_school_classrooms

Key finding three: Language demands intersect with gendered socio-cultural norms

Perhaps the area where the direct impact of gender on language development is most clear is when considering the influence of gendered socio-cultural norms on girls' learning behaviours and opportunities. Within the classroom, girls' participation is observed to be governed by different 'rules' to that of boys. For example, focusing on the Masaai community in Tanzania, Sane (page 48) highlights that there are gendered expectations of behaviour that limit girls' interactions, particularly with adolescent and adult men. Adamson (page 39) observes that feelings of shame and a fear of making mistakes lead students to self-silence, with girls being particularly vulnerable to worries about judgment and humiliation from teachers and peers. These gendered patterns of interaction further constrain opportunities for girls to talk and develop confidence in the LoI, as mentioned above.

Gendered norms also have a significant impact on girls' opportunities for learning outside of school, with several contributions noting that high levels of household chores limit the availability of time to revise curricular content and key vocabulary from the day's classes. (Milligan et al. (page 10), Girls' Stories (page 14), GEC overview (page 26). Where girls face particularly heavy household responsibilities, this also impacts on their school attendance, further limiting their opportunities for exposure to, and practising the LoI.

Across the contributions, it becomes clear that the requirement to learn through an unfamiliar LoI acts as an extra burden for girls, who, in many cases, and particularly as they reach adolescence, already carry greater responsibilities than their male peers. Contributors describe this as an 'intersection' of language and other burdens (Milligan et al., page 10) and as a 'double-disadvantage' (Salama, page 50). Similarly, in the GEC Overview (page 26), language is identified as 'an additional barrier for girls' which overlaps with wider socio-economic and cultural barriers such as poverty, rurality, and disability.

Where next for girls' education and language of instruction?

The evidence presented clearly demonstrates that there is a relationship between an unfamiliar LoI and girls' educational experiences and outcomes. By learning in a language that they do not fully understand, girls may be more likely to dropout and less likely to transition with good outcomes in examinations across the curriculum. There are also suggestions that language impacts on the socio-emotional aspects of learning, for example, through compounding feelings of shame. Significantly, the evidence also points to the uneven impact of an unfamiliar LoI on girls.

Millions of girls may, therefore, be physically included in the classroom but not 'epistemically included' because of the LoI, meaning that they are prevented from accessing:

- **New curricular concepts in the LoI,**
- **Opportunities for language development particularly through structured talk, and**

- **Sustained engagement in 'meaning-making' activities that require exploration through language[9].**

Examples from this policy brief that demonstrate how LoI is a barrier to such inclusion focus on the ways that use of an unfamiliar language prevents children from engaging in sustained talk, summarising, reframing points in their own words, asking questions, taking risks and giving explanations (in both written and spoken form). Evidence also suggests that there may be 'plateau' points (GEC Somalia spotlight, page 35) where the curriculum expects children to show these skills but proficiency in LoI prevents their ability to go beyond 'safe-talk', the repetition of teachers' words or writing down and memorising notes from the board or textbook. When this intersects with broader gendered socio-cultural norms, it follows that girls, in particular, will struggle to go beyond grasping basic vocabulary or concepts.

While individual contributions to this policy brief also suggest some specific policy implications, we finish our Executive summary with some key recommendations:

- **Consider LoI in the design of girls' education initiatives, particularly in the ways that it may be contributing to low learning rates and feelings of social exclusion among those girls most at risk of dropout and poor performance;**
- **Give greater language support to girls as they transition into either an unfamiliar LoI or the educational level when language demands increase (eg at the start of lower secondary education), especially through opportunities for sustained and structured talk;**
- **Develop teacher training related to pedagogical approaches that support epistemic inclusion for all girls in the classroom;**
- **Consider not only the language used but also the complexity of that language (eg vocabulary, sentence structure) in girls-focused materials; and**
- **Incorporate language proficiency and preference in national and international assessments to enable greater understanding of the impact of LoI on educational outcomes and the differences both across and within genders.**

We offer these recommendations in the context of current LoI policy trajectories where children continue to learn in monolingual classrooms and in unfamiliar languages. But we will always advocate for education systems across Sub-Saharan Africa where LoI policy and practice reflects and celebrates the rich multilingual realities of girls' lives.

---

[9] This definition is drawn from other work by the authors, both in this collection and in preparation. Our understanding of epistemic inclusion/exclusion builds upon work by: Guzula, X., McKinney, C. and Tyler, R. 2016. Languaging-for-learning: Legitimising translanguaging and enabling multimodal practices in third spaces. Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 34 (3), pp. 211-26. https://bua-lit.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Guzula-McKinney-Tyler-2016-Proof.pdf

and Kiramba, L. K. 2018. Language ideologies and epistemic exclusion. *Language and Education,* 32 (4), pp. 291-312. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1268&context=teachlearnfacpub

Our understanding of issues relating to LoI is based on extensive wider engagement in this field, for example:

Milligan, L. O. 2020. Towards a social and epistemic justice approach for exploring the injustices of English as a Medium of Instruction in basic education. *Education Review.* https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/towards-a-social-and-epistemic-justice-approach-for-exploring-the and Adamson, L. 2021. Language of instruction: a question of disconnected capabilities. *Comparative Education,* 57(2), pp. 187-205. http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/242897/2/242897.pdf

About the Editors of the policy brief

Lizzi O. Milligan and Laela Adamson

Dr Lizzi O. Milligan is a Reader in the Department of Education at the University of Bath where her research and teaching focuses on education and social justice, with a particular focus on the use of English as a Medium of basic education in low-income countries. She was the principal investigator of the ESRC project: *A case study of girls' education experiences in English medium Rwandan basic education* (ES/S001972/1).

Dr Laela Adamson is an ESRC postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Education at the University of Bath. Her fellowship – *Connecting knowledge(s) about language, learning and social justice in education* (ES/W005484/1) – builds upon her PhD from the UCL Institute of Education where she focused on capabilities and language in Tanzanian secondary schools.

Chapter one: Focus on Rwanda

The intersection of gender and language in girls' educational experiences and outcomes in Rwandan basic education

Lizzi O. Milligan, Aline Dorimana, Aloysie Uwizeyemariya, Alphonse Uworwabayeho, Kuchah Kuchah, Laela Adamson, Terra Sprague

Background

The co-authors of this contribution from Universities of Bath, Rwanda and Leeds worked together on *A case study of girls' education experiences in English medium Rwandan basic education* (@girlsEMIRwanda), an ESRC-funded project (ES/S001972/1)[10]. Through a mixed-methods case study design, the project explored the ways that learning in English influenced girls' educational experiences and outcomes throughout the basic education cycle, focusing on the examination years at the end of primary (P6) and lower secondary (S3). Each researcher took responsibility for different aspects of data generation and analysis. This, and all outputs from the project, represent our collective endeavour, and are generated in collaboration with the 48 girls and 20 teachers who participated in the study.

Research summary

Rwanda is often described as a 'success story' in girls' education, with significant gains in some areas of gender parity[11]. It is also one of the few countries in the world where all children learn from the first day of primary school in a dominant language, in this case, English. Munyaneza and Mugiraneza discuss, in their contribution to this policy brief (page 19), the impact that this is having on learners in the early years. In our study in Rwanda, we focused on girls at the end of both primary (P6) and lower secondary education (S3) to identify the ways that learning in English impacts on girls' experiences and transitions to latter stages of education. We focus particularly on the years of lower secondary education, when language demands of the curriculum increase, to demonstrate some of the ways that learning in English intersects with socio-economic and cultural gender-based concerns to limit girls' learning.

In the first phase of our study, we identified the trends between girls' results in the 2018 English examinations, and the rurality, poverty and gender-bias of the district in which they lived[12]. Key findings in this analysis include:

- **While there are very high pass rates for primary English examinations (95%+), approaching three quarters (73.69%) of girls are getting a low pass grade (40-49%). This compares with just one in twenty who score over 60%. These results are broadly comparable between boys and girls. Although this is not a clear marker of English language proficiency, we suggest that these low-scoring pass grades may mean many children are transitioning to secondary education with very limited English language.**

---

[10] https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FS001972%2F1

[11] See for example: Girls' Education in Rwanda a Success Story in East Africa - The Borgen Project

[12] For more information about the methodology used:

Uworwabayeho, A., Milligan, L. O. and Kuchah, K. 2021. Mapping the emergence of a gender gap in English in Rwandan primary and secondary schools. *Issues in Educational Research,* 31 (4), pp. 1312-1329. http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/uworwabayeho.pdf

- **By the end of lower secondary, approaching half of children fail their English examinations (46.62%). Here, gender differences are clear with girls more likely to fail than boys nationally (51.26% for girls; 41.33% for boys) and in every district. In four districts, more than 60% of girls are failing. Gender differences are also seen among students scoring 60+ (11.09% for girls; 17.43% for boys).**
- **While gender differences cannot be fully explained by analysis of how rural, poor or gender-biased the district is, there is a clear divide between Rwanda's capital Kigali and the rest of the country, both across and within genders. For example, in Kirehe district, in Eastern province, we see 63.77% of girls failing English S3 examinations (compared with 50.29% of boys in that district, and 30.53% of girls in the Kigali district of Nyarugenge). Similarly, only 3.97% of girls in Kirehe district score 60+ in their English S3 examinations (compared with 10.89% of boys in that district, and 27.88% of girls in Nyarugenge).**

Qualitative findings from four schools in Kirehe and Nyarugenge, as well as Burera and Ruhango districts, offered rich context to these quantitative analyses. We conducted narrative interviews with 48 P6 and S3 girls, alongside 32 classroom observations (from across the curriculum) where we focused on the girls' engagement and participation in class. The schools and girls were sampled to broadly reflect girls' differing levels of achievement and attendance.

Classroom observations revealed that, particularly at S3 level, many girls struggle to follow content in English and have very limited opportunities to talk in English, leading to silence in the classroom. Interview data from girls across the four districts supported these findings with many girls stating challenges related to understanding and highlighting the importance of teacher and peer use of Kinyarwanda, the national language, for their learning. Teachers further suggested that girls are more likely to rely on memorisation and repetition of key concepts than their male counterparts. These findings suggest that while girls may be physically included in the classroom, the use of English as the LoI contributes to their *epistemic exclusion*[13]. By this we mean that they are given limited access to:

1. **New curricular concepts;**
2. **Opportunities for English language development, particularly through structured talk, and**
3. **Sustained engagement in meaning-making activities that require exploration of and through language.**

There are important implications here for the meaningful achievement of inclusion for all learners in the classroom, but our findings suggest that these may particularly unfairly impact (most) girls more than their male peers. This is due to the ways that gendered expectations and norms related to household chores and how girls should behave intersect with insecurities relating to socio-economic circumstances, and LoI demands, to create a multi-layered burden for these girls to carry.

While the nature of each individual student's circumstances differs, some girls are more heavily burdened than others. We found this consistently in both urban and rural settings, although the socio-economic context of the school shaped the nature of the gendered issues experienced. Further analysis through the grouping of girls into typologies further accentuated that (1) the intersection of gender and language challenges are particularly focused at lower secondary level

---

[13] Please see the references given in the introduction of this policy brief for the scholarship that has influenced our definition of the term 'epistemic exclusion'. We are developing this in a journal article: Kuchah, K., Adamson, L., Uwizemariya, A., Dorimana, A., Uworwabayeho, A. and Milligan, L. In preparation. Silencing in the classroom: Rwandan girls' epistemic exclusion in English Medium secondary education. To be submitted to: *Language and Education.*

and (2) that the intersection plays out differently for different types of girls[14]. Table 1 outlines the five typologies of girls and the role of learning in English in their educational experiences and outcomes. The stories of Iza, Raissa, Gloria, Marie Louise and Kayitesi are personalised portrayals of each of the typologies, combining the girls' narratives and observed behaviour in class for all girls within that typology.

Table 1: Typologies of girls' learning in English at S3 level

Girls that are…	Typology overview	The role of learning in English
At risk (Iza's story)	Living in financially and physically insecure home environments, school is primarily a social space to escape from home worries. They are expected to drop out or fail their S3 examinations. In class, they are almost entirely silent and disengaged, particularly in the teacher-led parts of the lessons. They all live in rural areas, and some have repeated school years.	These girls are not following most of the content in all lessons. They rely on teacher and peer use of Kinyarwanda in the classroom to help access even a minimal amount of the curriculum. The classroom is the only space where they could develop their English, but they do not talk.
At the tipping point (Raissa's story)	These are those who may just about pass their S3 examinations. They have some home burdens but try to find time for some homework. They rely on learning in the classroom, and some peer support. Their talk in class is restricted to safe responses to teacher questions. They come from all four districts.	English may be the barrier that determines whether these girls are able to pass their S3 examinations. They are reliant on teacher code-switching and peer-explanation outside of the classroom for basic and subject-specific vocabulary to enable some access to the school curriculum. They have minimal opportunities to develop their English beyond this.
Going against the odds (Gloria's story)	Despite heavy home burdens, these girls remain engaged in class and find time (even if it is at 3:00 am) to revise to keep up. They hope to pass their S3 examinations and will do whatever they can to continue in their studies. Their teachers tend to talk negatively about	They want to achieve in English but may lack confidence to speak in English in class and can see it as a barrier to more consistent teacher attention. They are motivated by seeing 'educated' people who can speak English.

[14] A more detailed account of these typologies is in preparation: Milligan, L., Dorimana, A., Uwizemariya, A., Sprague, T. and Uworwabayeho, A. In preparation. The differential burden of learning in English medium education for Rwandan girls. To be submitted to: *Comparative Education.*

	them and while they often feel ignored in the classroom, they strive to engage as much as they can. They came from all four districts in the study.	
Using multiple strategies (Marie Louise's story)	These girls are on track to pass their S3 examinations, including in English. In class, they are not consistently engaged but do some talk in English. Outside of class, they draw on different types of peer support and quiet homework time to enable them to memorise and develop their understanding. They have the time to do this because of lower home demands. They are primarily based in one rural district (Kirehe).	They don't talk explicitly about language but demonstrate a range of strategies to enable them to keep up in English medium schooling, particularly outside of the classroom. Importance of peer support mechanisms suggests significant use of Kinyarwanda.
The teachers' favourites (Kayitesi's story)	These girls are high achievers in English and across the curriculum. They are expected to transition to upper secondary school. They have minimal home burdens and engage in home study, peer support (with other high achievers) and are consistently engaged and active in the classroom. Teachers speak highly of them, and they speak highly of teachers. They are mainly based in Kigali.	English is less of a barrier because they have the time, space and support mechanisms needed to achieve well. In class, they sometimes have opportunities for different types of talk (eg summarising) and are called upon by the teacher, but suggestions that the highest achieving boys get more chance to ask questions and take risks.

The development of typologies and girls' narratives enabled us to see that the impact of learning in English is particularly accentuated for girls most at risk of dropout and those scoring lower marks. This has significant implications for the girls' education agenda and meaningful outcomes for all girls.

Recommendations for policy change and research:

- **If English is to continue as the LoI throughout the basic education cycle, then far greater attention needs to be paid to the ways that it may be contributing to inequitable experiences and outcomes both across and within genders.**
- **Girls, particularly those at risk of failing and clustered around a pass grade, need more support to develop their English language so that they can fully engage and participate in the English medium classroom. This is particularly important given that these girls are often very limited in their opportunities to do so outside of the classroom.**
- **Bearing in mind these significant challenges and inequities associated with the use of English as the LoI, many students (but particularly girls who carry additional burdens) would benefit greatly from the use of Kinyarwanda as the LoI.**

A girl that is at risk: Iza's story

Iza is 17 years old and lives in Burera, one of the most rural and poor districts in Rwanda. In Burera, around half (51.09%) of girls fail their English examination, compared with just over one third (35.16%) of boys. Iza is currently scoring less than 40% in her English marks and is described by her teacher as not attending school regularly, which they feel impacts her performance. Her teachers describe her as careless and a learner who does not make effort to improve.

Iza lives with her mother and has a father who has two wives, so he is present only part of the time. This causes conflict at home and her parents argue. She has one brother who lives at home. Iza enjoys listening to music, particularly gospel and Rwandan music as this helps her to relax. She listens to these songs when she is in the kitchen cooking. She is the main cook for the family and says that this is her duty because this is girls' work, and she is the only remaining girl at home. Iza explains that she is very busy with domestic chores and is working hard. She rarely revises for lessons at home because she is typically busy with housework until 9:00 pm and feels exhausted and cannot revise. In addition to the heavy burden of home chores, Iza finds her home environment insecure because they live in a bad place near bars which is noisy with people fighting, which is another thing that makes it difficult for her to concentrate on her studies. She prefers to study when the place is calm without this and when no children are round making noise. Her parents do not encourage her to study and are completely disengaged from her learning, yet Iza does appreciate it when her mother discusses reproductive health with her and answers questions.

Iza seems to look forward to school as a break from her domestic work, saying that when she is at school, she can relax a bit. She appreciates the company of her friends on the way to and from school even though the journey presents her with some difficult peer pressure situations, as there are boys who come looking for girlfriends and they want her to stop and talk and that this delays her. Iza is in the class choir, which she says helps her to feel attached to her school. She misses her classmates and school during the holiday times or any time they are not going to school. Iza seems to value her friendships, commenting that she likes chatting with other learners and this is sometimes about lessons, but they share other stories, too, some which include reproductive related issues.

She does not attend school early for self-study nor does she stay after school for this. Iza seems to miss a lot of school because of her period and not having sanitary pads because her parents cannot purchase them and sometimes the school doesn't have them either. When this happens, she goes home and doesn't return until her period is over. In the classroom, she is observed as being mostly silent, passive and not actively engaged. Even in paired activity, she is observed as not speaking. When she is selected to answer a question, she reads the answer from her notebook.

The impact of learning in English seems evident with Iza. Academically, she enjoys Maths the most because it doesn't require much speaking, writing or memorisation. She comments that other subjects have a lot more complicated English to read and memorise. She says that her Biology, Maths and English teachers teach well so that she can understand, and this is why she likes their lessons at school. She values English because she knows that she may need these language skills for employed work and because it is a LoI, and she knows that if she knew English better it would help her to understand other subjects. It seems possible that she is simply not accessing the content of other subjects because of the language barrier. She says she is not good at English and compares herself to her brother who is in S2 but is 'better' than her because he speaks English with teachers and the director of studies which has built up his confidence and helped him improve his English skills.

A girl at the tipping point: Raissa's story

Raissa is 17 years old and lives in Ruhango, a rural district, but not among the most rural or poor. Her teachers describe her as someone who is 'doing okay' without any significant problems and they hope that she will pass her exams, including her English exam. She attends regularly and sometimes participates in class.

Raissa lives with both her parents and has an older sister at boarding school. She has a lot of housework and says she cannot refuse to help her parents because they pay her school fees. She is responsible for cooking, fetching water and looking for grasses for the cow. She gets up at 5:40 am so she can do these chores and take care of fertiliser or beans and sweeps the floor before going to school. She tries to do the work quickly in the evenings so there will be time for revising which she thinks is important for keeping up with her studies. Sometimes her parents refuse to leave the lights on because they are going to sleep. She finds that when she uses the torch for light to study, she sometimes falls asleep before turning it off and then the battery is dead in the morning which means she can't revise the next night. She says that she is motivated by students who are at boarding school because they do not need to worry about house chores and these students encourage her because she wants to be like them.

Raissa revises at school in the morning with two of her friends who help her with the difficult lessons. They meet to study together in the morning. This helps her in part because she says she becomes 'distracted' when at home she cannot read and translate for herself from English to Kinyarwanda. Raissa also uses music to help her memorise. She acknowledges that it is difficult to memorise something in English if you do not understand the content or understand the meaning in Kinyarwanda, so she uses music to try to overcome this.

She enjoys History class, partly because she likes the way the teacher teaches. She explains that he translates from English to Kinyarwanda or mixes the two languages to help them understand. She is encouraged by students who can speak English without difficulty. She says that when these children are asked questions in English without needing translation to Kinyarwanda, this encourages her to try harder next time. She describes also when they are in small groups during exercises 'you must understand them in order to find what to say in front of others.' Some students won't explain everything in Kinyarwanda, and she really wants to be able to explain to herself what was not translated.

In the classroom she is observed as being 'sometimes distracted' during the teacher-led work. She is 'not active' in the teacher-led sections of three out of four lessons, but the exception is Biology when she was described as 'focused' and 'active', raising her hand and contributing successfully. However, when she was called upon randomly, she was not able to give a correct answer. In the activity, she was collaborating with her neighbours and talking to them. In the Maths lesson, she was distracted reading the book throughout the lesson, sometimes talking to her neighbours. She was sometimes listening to the teacher and seemed to be comparing what the teacher was teaching with what was written in the book. This variety of engagement and participation fits with her narrative of finding English a barrier to her understanding.

A girl that is going against the odds: Gloria's story

Gloria is 17 years old and lives in Burera, one of the poorest and most rural districts of Rwanda. She lives with her parents and two younger siblings with two older siblings no longer at home. Her father drives a motorcycle and is often not able to provide school materials when Gloria asks. Because she is the eldest child at home, she does most of the housework such as fetching water, collecting firewood, preparing food, sweeping and washing. She doesn't like having a lot of work at home because this takes away time at home for revision and homework.

According to Gloria's teachers, she used to attend regularly and concentrate in class, but during the initial COVID-19 outbreak, she had taken on some short-term jobs. They think she is no longer

taking her studies seriously and has a boyfriend. They wonder if she may drop-out before completing S3. She shares feelings of shame for slipping from 5th place in the class to 26th. Gloria's own words suggest that she has experienced a lot of sexual pressure, including from an older man, and that she has had to engage in sex work in exchange for food. It is also clear that financial challenges regularly worry her, and can prevent her from attending school (eg because of a lack of sanitary products). Being part of an association, which has helped her to buy a goat, has helped allay some of her concerns.

Despite these significant pressures, Gloria aspires high – to improve her living conditions and to get a job as a teacher or nurse. She is determined to reach this goal. She regularly talks about jealous neighbours who disrespect and discourage her from wanting to attend school. She feels motivated by seeing people who have office jobs and are 'educated', a marker which is often associated with knowing English well in Rwanda. One way that she shows her determination is through the time she dedicates to revision – doing schoolwork from 3:00 am at home so that there are no distractions and getting to school at 6.30 am for quiet time. These periods of quiet time were frequently discussed by girls in our study as spaces to memorise vocabulary and revise curricular concepts.

Peer support is important to Gloria – she likes to sit with learners who she says are brighter than her and they help her to understand the content and to do exercises. For example, she likes Maths at school because here she can get people to help her. However, sometimes, she explains, they will not help her because they are jealous and don't want her to get better grades than them. When she does help others, this is because explaining lessons to others helps her to master the content.

Gloria says she hates when teachers ignore her when she asks a question, or when she doesn't get a straight answer from them; sometimes because she uses Kinyarwanda and is chastised. She says she worries about losing self-confidence to speak in English in class when she's called on. In the classroom, Gloria is observed as being 'very active' during the teacher-led portions of three out of four lessons. She contributes during teacher-led questions in all lessons. Her answers are not always correct, but it is noted that she doesn't appear to be discouraged as she continues to raise her hand. She often raises her hand to contribute to the discussion of the activity but is not frequently called upon. At one point in the Geography lesson, Gloria asked a question, "What is the difference between vegetation and climate?". The teacher encouraged a student to answer and the girl sitting next to her answered the question. Her determination to keep trying to contribute despite her worries about being able to contribute well in English sets her apart from many other girls in our study.

Overall, Gloria seems to get a great amount of joy and pleasure from learning and understanding things well and challenges herself to tackle difficult subjects or topics. She is determined, tenacious and set to pass her examinations, including English, despite the financial and gendered challenges that she faces.

A girl that uses multiple strategies: Marie Louise's story

Marie Louise is 16 years old and lives in Kirehe, a very rural district of Rwanda with the highest failure rates for girls in secondary English in the country (63.77% of girls fail, compared with 50.29% of boys). She is one of the girls that is expected to pass her English examination, currently scoring a merit grade. While she is described by teachers as a learner who attends very regularly, they say she does not participate actively in class and suggest that this is because she has poor concentration. Teachers comment that that there is a good relationship between the school and her parents, who often visit the school.

Marie Louise lives with her parents and one brother who is a motorist and regularly arrives home late. She helps her mother to do some of the housework but doesn't have a lot of chores at home. She appreciates that her brother stays at home on weekends because this enables her to join her

classmates at school for their self organised revision sessions. These sessions, and other peer support time, are important for Marie Louise to support her access to curricular content in English.

Marie Louise draws on peer support groups and quiet study time to help her to do well. She says that working in groups of active learners helps her a lot because when every member can contribute, they can help one another. She explains what she knows, and she also learns from others' explanations or exercises. These peer support sessions are multilingual. Marie Louise also really appreciates quiet time, away from peers interfering with her studying, so that she can memorise English content from lessons. She studies every evening at home to go over the content they've covered in all the lessons of the day. She feels that if she doesn't that the amount of learning will pile up and she will not recall it. She says she needs to do this to stay on the same page and not get lazy and she worries that if she didn't, that her marks would slip because even with this practice, she is around the 50% mark.

Marie Louise admits that there are some subjects she enjoys revising at home because she can read and understand them at home, such as entrepreneurship. She reads 'soft' books in English to help her improve her English vocabulary but wishes there were more school books available to her through the school library. Her father helps her with English and French during the holiday. These are all strategies that Marie Louise draws on to enable her to develop her English and access curricular content; and she has time at home and can attend school regularly to be able to use these strategies.

During class, across lessons she is observed as not being consistently well engaged. During teacher-led sections in Chemistry and History & Citizenship she is observed taking notes while the teacher talks, but in Maths and Geography it is noted that she is not always actively engaged. Marie Louise seems to make the greatest effort to participate in Maths when she raises her hand to volunteer answers to evaluation questions. In the three other subjects it is noted that she is sometimes chatting with others in Kinyarwanda during the activities. It is clear from these classes that Marie Louise looks to the teacher, her peers and her books to support her learning and that she needs Kinyarwanda to help access the curriculum.

A girl that is a teacher's favourite: Kayitesi's story

Kayitesi is 16 and lives in Nyarugenge, the district of Kigali with the highest pass and distinction rates in the country. Kayitesi is expected to get a merit or distinction in her S3 English examination. In Nyarugenge, this puts her among the top 30% of her class, while nationally among the top 14%. She attends very regularly and is expected to transition to S4 at the end of the year. Her teachers describe her as a bright and conscientious girl. Her parents encourage her to study hard and they follow up on her work, encouraging her not to look for distractions. Kayitesi does not talk about any financial or insecurity concerns in her home and she has a lot of time to revise. Kayitesi likes to study Biology and History and likes to revise at home because it's quiet and there aren't distractions like mobile phones or a TV on. She studies these subjects at home because they are easier for her and if she's taken good notes, all she needs is some time to memorise them in a quiet place. For these she doesn't need exercises and formulas with other learners. She likes to read English schoolbooks because they are good stories, and she says that when you try in reading you improve your knowledge.

Kayitesi is highly motivated and was admitted to a public boarding school after her good grades in P6 but didn't like the life there so her parents agreed for her to join a day school near her home. She dreams of working hard. She wants to be among the best performers in the national examination because she wants to be selected to an excellent boarding school to continue to study Maths, Chemistry and Biology. She is encouraged by the teachers' and headmaster's stories of good learners and the success that resulted from their hard work at their school and elsewhere. These success stories motivate her, and she wants to be like them so that her

teachers will talk about her in the future. She is also motivated by seeing people who have studied successfully and have a good life thanks to education.

Kayitesi often comes to the early morning study time at school (6:30 – 7:20 am) and she likes this time because there are few students there and it is quiet. She also likes to work with other learners who are doing well – they learn together to help each other, particularly in Science, helping each other to learn more complex curricular content in English. During lessons, Kayitesi says she likes paying attention to the teachers and asking questions when she doesn't understand something. She enjoys it when the teacher gives exercises to check their understanding and makes corrections amongst them. She enjoys studying Maths, Chemistry and Physics because these are the subjects with which she requires more support, and in school she can get that support from teachers and classmates with whom she discusses and does exercises. She likes that her teachers encourage her to study hard, particularly the Physics and entrepreneurship teachers who she says care much for her. She dislikes the noise and stories from her classmates who talk when the teacher is not there and narrate movies. She says she is interested in those things but prefers to keep them for break time. For her, class should be for class activities and other things come at break time.

Kayitesi is described as 'very active' during the teacher-led portions of all lessons and is described as 'engaged' in all activities, except in Chemistry. In all lessons, she raised her hand to contribute, and the observer notes that her contributions were successful. In History & Citizenship, it is noted that she raised her had more than four times and she spoke for more than three minutes explaining the history of revolution in France. She appears to be following along, even if she is not writing answers in her notebook. In some lessons, she is fully engaged with the activities and contributes to lessons with success. In other lessons, she does not raise her hand, but is selected at random to answer a question. In one case, she was unable to give the correct answer, but the teacher encouraged her to stand up and try again.

Personal reflections on researching language of instruction and girls' education in Rwanda

Aline Dorimana and Aloysie Uwizeyemariya

Background

Aline Dorimana is a PhD candidate at the College of Education, University of Rwanda. Aloysie Uwizemariya is a Lecturer in English for Academic Purposes at the College of Education, University of Rwanda. They were the lead researchers on the data generation for the *A case study of girls' education experiences in English medium Rwandan basic education* project, including conducting interviews with the case study girls, teachers and headteachers and observing the girls in English Medium Classrooms. Here, they reflect on their own experiences as women growing up in Rwanda and new insights that they have developed on the intersection of language and gender through their involvement in the project.

Introducing Aline and Aloysie

Aline: **I did my primary education in Northern province of Rwanda. I remember that the language of learning was French with one hour of English as a lesson per week. The class was composed of more girls than boys and the sitting was arranged so that a boy sat with a girl. The front desk near the door was my seat. Our teacher (female, who used to teach us many subjects in French) placed me in front not only because I was a brilliant student but also because she knew that I could not find time to revise lessons at home due to home activities (including collecting cow's grass and fetching water) and lack of light. So, I had to sit in front and maximise my learning at school. I remember that when we had homework, I used to do it on my way home or going to**

collect grasses or I used to make light with firewood so that I could do the homework. I did this because I hated being the last of the class, I had always to be among the top five. I could not speak French, but I could understand the question and respond in fake French or sometimes I included some words in Kinyarwanda when I failed to find the good French word. French was for beautiful girls from rich and educated families who were over proud and confident to speak. The English teacher (male) was a fresh graduate. He was good in the language and used to approach boys more than girls.

I felt that being able to speak English required me to be overproud and completely transform my speaking style, which I could not do. I only performed well in tests and got good grades since I had to be among the top. Girls were lucky when we had a female teacher. This teacher used to be closer to girls than boys and she even taught us how to pass exams with good grades. She taught us how to memorise definitions and even paragraphs. I remember she used to sit at the back of the room and tell us to repeat three words many times with closed eyes until we could remember the same words after a while. This exercise was productive on the girls' side as girls outperformed boys in subjects where memorisation was evident like in science and technology. However, boys could explain things better than girls.

My silence of speaking neither French nor English continued in secondary level because no-one encouraged me to speak in a foreign language in public, even in the class. The teaching was completely traditional - the teacher had to talk, and students listen. There was no opportunity to present the work. There was no interaction in the classroom at all since most of the time, the teacher was busy demonstrating formulae and procedures on the chalkboard. No-one was allowed to speak, otherwise he punished you.

Aloysie: **At secondary school level, French was the medium of instruction. In senior one, it was not easy to understand what teachers were teaching in History, Geography, Biology, etc, due to my poor level of proficiency in French. This frustrated me a lot since it was not even easy to memorise what I could not understand. Luckily, I was living with my uncle who had a university level of studies, and he had a commitment to sit with me during the weekend to explain in Kinyarwanda the weekly notes from all lessons. His strategy was to ask me to read paragraph by paragraph and ask me the meaning in my mother tongue, when I failed, he could explain in Kinyarwanda. This strategy made me work hard by being active and attentive in class, using a dictionary to try to understand something before he asked and explained what I failed to understand. I had to write a summary explanation (in Kinyarwanda) in another notebook, which could help me during my revision. This helped me understand and easily memorise for tests and exams. This boosted my learning, and I ranked first from senior one to senior six except in two trimesters when one boy defeated me. However, when I finished secondary school, I was not proud of myself, not confident at all in either French or English. I wished I had studied Sciences, or Law instead of languages because I could hear some people who did other subjects speak those languages more than me.**

Aline: **The aspect of the girls' narratives that resonated with me was how I grew up. I grew up in a low-income family where farming was the principal activity at 98%. This encouraged me to make efforts in my studies. I could not complain too much that I could not speak the foreign language, my focus was on understanding the question and responding using my home language. Also, I was not afraid to speak in front of boys because my family raised us equally. Everyone's education was important at home. Everyone could do any work at the house, so none was above another because of gender. But boys were allowed to get home late before dinner, but for us girls, we could not exceed 6:00 pm, not because we had work to do at home, but for our safety. Our mother used to be there to check on us all the time, make sure that no-one abused us.**

Aloysie: **In primary, like the girls in the study, I had more work than my brothers. I had to help my mother clean, cook, fetch water, collect firewood, etc, whereas my brothers were mainly**

responsible for cows. However, this didn't disturb me because I didn't need much time for self-study since everything was clear in my mother tongue. I could only do a short revision before exams. In Secondary school, the only burden was to struggle with the medium of instruction during the first years. I was living in Kigali and my uncle could help me. At university, I struggled cramming alongside the usual women's home chores and looking after my children because I had three kids. Lack of sufficient resources was another challenge. I had to revise when other people were sleeping because I wanted to be competitive and self-reliant, which I am proud to be today.

Aline: **I felt happy that the girls in the study saw me as a role model and educated woman. I felt more confident speaking in English, and I wanted to show them that it is okay to make mistakes in English. Girls should not be ashamed to make mistakes because through mistakes, we learn from them. In addition, I felt the research was important as girls need to be heard. Of course, girls need role models and inspirational talks to motivate them to continue their learning to the highest level, especially those from rural areas. More importantly, I felt that I have a responsibility to talk to parents so that they value girls' education and reduce burdens for girls.**

Aloysie: **Though I am still struggling even today, I keep trying my best to make it. I am somehow empowered by my country's gender policy that includes women in different activities. That's how I manage to be empowered through projects that need women who are still under-represented in academia. I was therefore very happy to serve as a role model to the girls in our study who were inspired by my experience and learned that it is possible to work hard and be successful.**

Recommendations for policy change and research

- **These reflections resonate with the experiences of girls currently in secondary school, demonstrating that challenges relating to LoI, gendered expectations and additional burdens in the home environment persist and require greater attention.**
- **Girls benefit from opportunities to interact with role models with whom they can identify.**

Pitfalls of using a dominant language as a medium of instruction in lower grades in Rwanda

Jean-Marie-Vianney Munyaneza and Jean-Pierre Mugiraneza

Background

Jean-Marie-Vianney Munyaneza and Dr Jean-Pierre Mugiraneza work for the Education Development Trust in Rwanda on the Building Learning Foundation (BLF) programme. This £25 million programme has been funded by UK Aid with the aim to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in all of Rwanda's government primary schools by providing technical assistance in three areas: systems strengthening, school leadership, and teacher development for foundational skills in English and Maths in primary grades 1 to 3. This think-piece draws on the programme's evaluation reports to explain the possible drawbacks to using English as a medium of instruction in lower primary education, particularly for girls.

Research summary

Shifting medium of instruction (MoI) from mother tongue to dominant languages is at the forefront of discussions of education policymakers, practitioners, and development partners in Rwanda. The recent shift from Kinyarwanda to English as a MoI in lower primary is likely to affect the quality of teaching which ultimately can exacerbate the existing learning gap among girls. Among other pitfalls of this potential shift, there is a likely detrimental effect to girls' education in Rwanda.

The BLF baseline report on designing and delivering girls' clubs in Rwanda revealed that 80% of girls spend more time with their parents than anyone else in the society[15]. More than 90% of girls spend time on domestic chores whereas below 60% of boys will be involved in domestic work. A quarter of girls will miss their classes because they are engaged in household activities. While most boys reported to have been relying on teachers' support, girls argued that parents have been their top source of support to improving their performance – at this juncture, it is important to highlight that most of parents, especially in rural areas, use Kinyarwanda to communicate and the literacy rate is still low. Therefore, the parents' support to girls' education in English might be counterproductive to quality of education in Rwanda.

The BLF process evaluation report of 2021 showed a significant decline of students' performance as compared to the previous similar evaluation conducted in 2020. The 2021 BLF progress assessment of learning domains of Maths (counting, reading numbers, comparing numbers, adding, and subtracting, multiplication and division, algebra/inverse operations and solving problems in context) showed that the percentage of student performance has declined by 20% from the previous similar assessment. Specifically, the girls' performance declined by 22%. While the decline can be explained by different factors that affected the education sector in the last two years, including the long school closure because of Covid-19 and the associated learning loss, it can also be explained by the shift of the LoI from English to Kinyarwanda in school lower grades.

From the two BLF evaluation reports, it is evident that girls' performance could be highly dependent on the support they get from their parents. Also, in situations where parents are the only source of support, eg, school closure, girls' performance tends to decline as compared to boys. There is a high correlation between the parent's capacity to support girls and their performance in key subjects such as Maths.

Arguably, using English as MoI in Rwandan schools still impacts on students' access, continuation, and performance in their education, as the level of motivation differs from one student to another, and one gender to another. Specifically for girls, limited motivators to go higher in their education in general, and to study STEM subjects in particular, couples with other gender-related barriers in education to contribute to the gender gap observed in Rwandan society. For example, family support and expectations from girls and boys at home still impacts on the proper use of free time to revise courses, do homework, use available household amenities, and even explore digital devices to acquire new knowledge in the dominant language which is English. STEM subjects, like others, are taught in English and most of the time require technical concepts to describe/understand some science equipment from a laboratory, complex maths equations, digital and computer technology, etc.

In this think piece, it is demonstrated that girls face limited exposure to English whether at school or at home due to gender socialisation and other cultural beliefs. In most cases, boys are more exposed to open forums than girls, including access to recreational and fun places where they meet and share. The gender division of labour (especially the unpaid care work) limits girls to resort to places that ignite language appetites. Therefore, we conclude with the following:

Recommendations for policy change and research:

- **To ensure gender equality in education where a dominant language is used as medium of instruction, the teaching and learning process of the dominant language must consider gender at its backbone to support both boys and girls to succeed. This should include efforts to alleviate gendered challenges faced by each of them in different settings (school/home).**

[15] This report and all evidence included in the brief will shortly be available https://buildinglearningfoundations.rw

Lessons from the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy in selected Rwandan 'schools of excellence'

Pui Ki Patricia Kwok

Background

Dr Pui Ki Patricia Kwok recently completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge. The findings that are presented in this contribution come from this PhD which explored the conceptualisation and implementation of learner-centred pedagogy as part of the new Rwandan competence-based curriculum (CBC) in four 'schools of excellence' in the capital city of Kigali[16].

Research summary

The reform efforts around the CBC marks a key stage in Rwanda's post-genocide educational transformation. The new curriculum is envisioned to improve learning outcomes, while meeting multiple socio-economic needs in line with national and global development agendas. A central curriculum objective is to promote holistic competencies, which include not only knowledge, but also skills, values and attitudes[17]. Gender and inclusive education are listed among the key areas of focus under "cross-cutting issues". The former is about promoting gender equality and equity through attending to gender roles and responsibilities, while the latter calls for valuing the diversity of backgrounds and abilities as a learning opportunity.

This doctoral research was conducted to explore how these curriculum objectives were implemented in Rwandan classrooms through 'learner-centred' pedagogy (LCP). A qualitative approach was adopted to engage with key Rwandan stakeholders comprising secondary school teachers, teacher trainers and government officials. The primary methods for gathering data were semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

Key point one: Language is a strong enabler of inclusion

Participants in the study shared the reform vision on classroom learning to be "active, participative and engaging rather than passive"[18]. They similarly described teachers as "facilitators" instead of the sole source of knowledge. The majority elaborated on how teachers should engage students in a list of hands-on and interactive activities, most commonly being group work, presentation and independent research. Notably, if students were encouraged to be involved in learning through these participatory activities, their familiarity with the medium of instruction (MoI) was a pre-requisite.

However, findings show that using English as MoI was a key barrier to LCP even in the four selected 'schools of excellence'. This challenge was noted by all participants across stakeholder groups. They unanimously highlighted that most teachers and students were yet to acquire functional proficiency in English. This was felt to be among the reasons for why classroom interaction remained rather restricted. The importance of language was further shown from a positive instance identified in a girls' school, in which a student was described similarly by her teachers as "smart" in contrast to her peers, who were being described as "shy". She was able to regularly make voluntary contribution of ideas and reframe points in her own words (see below

---

[16] Kwok, P.K.P. 2021. *The implementation of learner-centred pedagogy in Rwanda: Teachers as mediators*, [Unpublished doctoral dissertation], University of Cambridge.

[17] REB/MINEDUC. 2015. *Competence-based curriculum: summary of curriculum framework pre-primary to upper secondary 2015*, Kigali: Government of Rwanda. curriculum_framework_final_printed-compressed.pdf (wordpress.com)

[18] Ibid, p.23

example one). Her teachers converged on appreciating her exceptional comfort in English, which was linked to her prior experience in private schools. They believed this was the most influential factor supporting her participation in class.

Example one: English proficiency as an enabler of a girl's classroom participation

This student presented the reasons on: 'Why Ethiopia was not colonised':

> ***"From my discussion, I think let's take the example of Rwanda when they came to colonise Rwanda, they just came up with division. The reason why we are saying unity contributed to the reason why Ethiopia was not colonised is because, for example, when you take Rwanda, our country, it was the one colonised it convince them they came up with division. But for the Ethiopians, there was unity among them, so they were together, and they didn't trust the Europeans more than their fellow citizens. Are you convinced?"***

Yet, even if the language barrier was strongly felt, a dilemma was identified when teachers were divided on whether Kinyarwanda should be allowed in the classroom. Participants who valued mother tongue for learning similarly critiqued the sharp contrast in student engagement before and after transition to English. For instance, a teacher trainer noted that in Primary 3 where Kinyarwanda was the MoI "the class is loudly moving, students explaining", while in Primary 4, classes in the same school were described as "very silent". Others however preferred a strict adherence to the policy requirement. In line with the positive attitude towards English for its instrumental benefits, they valued the classroom as a rare site for students to practice English, as the English language was not widely spoken in everyday settings.

This dilemma can become more pressing as English has been stipulated as the MoI from Primary 1 onwards since 2019[19]. While teacher training was usually valued, its focus was largely reported to be on teachers' pedagogical skills, subject knowledge and their English proficiency. However, very little was mentioned on any specific programme or initiative which supported teachers to help students as English language learners more systemically.

Key point two. The attempt of "gender balance" in groups and turn-taking is important, but insufficient

Research evidence from this study also shows that all participants strongly valued the current reform as an opportunity to promote inclusion, attending to gender, special education needs, and abilities. This was deemed essential to challenge the discriminatory exclusion grounded in *iringaniza* 'quota system'[20], and to address the perceived lack of individualised support under the 'teacher-centred' approach. A teacher also believed classroom participation could help students

---

[19] **MINEDUC. 2019. *Communique Nº 3582/12.00/2019*, Kigali: Government of Rwanda.**

[20] The quota system enacted during the Second Republic (1973-1994) was reported to be a discriminatory policy, under which selections were made along the lines of ethnicity, region, and gender to determine one's educational and employment opportunities. For instance, this policy disproportionately restricted the presence of Tutsi in schools, civil service and other employment sectors to 9%.
Rutayisire, J., Kabano, J. and Rubagiza, J., 2004. Redefining Rwanda's Future: The role of curriculum in social reconstruction, in Tawil, S. and Harley, A. (eds.), *Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion,* Geneva: IBE, UNESCO, pp.315-374.
Magnarella, P. J., 2000. Comprehending genocide: The case of Rwanda. *Global Bioethics*, 13(1–2), pp. 23–43.

to challenge a traditional or cultural belief that "a woman was supposed to be seen, but not heard".

In practice, 'gender balance' was evident to be attended to by all teachers. They valued the use of group work as an important strategy to promote mixed-gender interaction. During lessons, this was regularly seen when teachers reminded students of forming mixed-gender groups such as: "Make sure you have gender balance! We are a mixed school, and we need to mix". Teachers also stipulated the compulsory rotation of roles in groups, such as having girls not always as secretaries, but also group leaders. During presentation, all teachers also showed consistent attention to gender during turn-taking. For instance, teachers often called a girl to contribute, even if volunteers who were usually boys were enthusiastically indicating their wish to be called through "teacher me!"

However, as evident across all four schools, the teacher-student interaction generally remained brief regardless of gender (see below in example two). Apart from the language factor, teachers in this study were committed to involving *all* students in large class sizes that ranged from 35 to 50 pupils. Consequently, the response time was often thinly distributed among different students, with inaudibility remaining a key concern when multiple students talked simultaneously. Moreover, due to the unavailability of pedagogical materials, teachers also had to leave extensive lesson time for copying notes with students. These limited the extent to which each student could construct fuller responses in English.

Example two: Students' brief responses to teachers

> ***Student one: [inaudible] hot***
>
> ***Teacher: hot water? Hot water?***
>
> ***Students (together): no***
>
> ***Teacher: hot what? What? I am not hearing because I am not in your ears!***
>
> ***Student two: must be hot and concentrated…***
>
> ***Students (together): can't hear!!!!***
>
> ***Student three: and cold and dilute***
>
> ***Teacher: cold and concentrated?***
>
> ***Student four: hot and concentrated***

While there was no visible gender bias identified from this study, it remained unclear whether the brief participation of girls and the mixed-gender grouping were sufficient to help students fully appreciate gender differences. This was further supported by the evidence that shows most teachers prioritising the collection of correct answers at the expense of further probing or in-depth reasoning (see example three below). While this pattern was not gender specific, this suggested that even if a girl was invited to participate and was also thanked by the teacher, it did not necessarily lead to a more engaging learning experience. Further evidence from student voice will be required to understand the feelings of girls who participated and their peers.

Example three: A girl invited by teachers to present answers

> ***Teacher: where is the problem? Where is the problem now?***
>
> ***(Student writes '3x + 5x – 10 + x +10 = 180', and 'x = 20' on the blackboard)***
>
> ***Teacher: you said x is equal to 20, how? Can you prove it? You said the answer is 20?***
>
> ***(The teacher then came closer to the blackboard and waited for the student to respond. The student read aloud the written steps to the teacher but did not provide the proof as requested by the teacher. She also did not explain her thinking process.)***
>
> ***Teacher: Thank you it's okay. Good.***
>
> ***Students (together): Teacher check, check, check!! Teacher me, teacher!***
>
> ***(The teacher proceeded to choose another student to re-do the question.)***

The two key points presented above suggest that while teachers in the selected schools were clearly committed to inviting participation of *all* in learning activities, English was among the key enablers for quality and meaningful engagement. As per the curriculum vision, if students' active engagement is central to the cultivation of competencies among other goals, the presented evidence raises significant concern that students without the ideal attributes and capacity were seemingly unable to benefit fully from such opportunities.

Recommendations for policy change and research:

- **Even in comparatively high-achieving contexts, the use of English as the LoI presents a notable barrier to equitable classroom interaction. If the vision of the competence-based curriculum (CBC) is to be achieved, greater attention must be paid to the impact of LoI on students', particularly girls', opportunities for meaningful and in-depth contributions.**

Chapter two: Language and the Girls' Education Challenge

Language of instruction (LoI) and the Girls' Education Challenge – An overview

Background

This overview and the five spotlight case-studies that follow are the collaborative result of contributions from: Johanna Arp; Jennifer Artibello; Clare Convey; Giulia Di Filippantonio; Nicolò di Marzo; Rachel Gondwe; Sandra Graham; Barbara Harvey; Fadimata Inorene; Samuel Katembo; Angela Keenan; Michelle Lewis Sandall; Edgar Makona; Alicia Mills; Abaynew Mulat Alemu; Mercy Muthui; Lotte Renault; Maheen Qureshi; Emma Sarton; Marie Schoeman.

Research summary

The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) works with 41 projects across 17 countries, focusing on girls' access, inclusion and learning. The GEC is funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and has enabled 1.54 million girls to access learning opportunities[21]. During the initial stages of implementation between 2012 and 2017, many GEC projects were struck by the challenges that language-in-education presented, both for the girls included in interventions and for project delivery and evaluation[22]. GEC projects have delivered many interventions including local language materials and dedicated support for the 69% of GEC girls who came to school unable to speak the official LoI. As a result, many projects have collected more data relating to language and have carefully considered the implications of these findings for their continuing work. This overview brings together findings and reflections from across the GEC portfolio.

Language: A common challenge across different contexts

In the different contexts in which the GEC works, LoI policies and practices take different forms, depending on the structure of national and regional education systems and the local language environments. Most of the countries are multilingual and schools often bring together students and teachers from more than one home language community. Despite differences in context, language is a widespread challenge and large numbers of girls across GEC projects are being educated through one (or more) language(s) with which they are unfamiliar. LoI is regularly identified by projects as a barrier for girls that impacts upon their opportunities for accessing, continuing, and thriving in education.

Note: For many GEC countries, there are multiple languages, used by larger (majority) populations and smaller (minority) groups. When referencing mother tongue above, more often than not, the LoI is the mother tongue of the majority in a community, and less often, includes the mother tongue of minority groups.

---

[21] Total number = 1,542,270 as of October 2021.

[22] For reflections about LoI from the end of Phase one, see Girls' Education Challenge (2017). *Language of Instruction in the Girls' Education Challenge: Sharing lessons from the field.* https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/et1lvdiv/lftf-language-of-instruction-in-the-gec-sep-2017.pdf

Table two: GEC countries and their LoI[23]

Country	Mother Tongue(s) (MT)[24]	LoI (Primary)	LoI (Secondary)
Afghanistan	Multiple	Dari and Pashto	Dari and Pashto
Democratic Republic of Congo	Multiple	National languages (Lingala, Kiswahili, Chiluba, Kikongo) Grades 1-4 French from Grade 5	French
Ethiopia	Multiple	MT Grades 1-8 Transition to English at different stages depending on region	English and Amharic
Ghana	Multiple	MT Grades 1-3	English
Kenya	Multiple	MT / language of the catchment area Grades 1-3 English from Grade 4	English
Malawi	Multiple	MT Grades 1-4 English from Grade 5	English
Mozambique	Multiple	MT Grades 1-3 Portuguese from Grade 4	Portuguese
Nepal	Multiple	MT Grades 1-3 Nepali from Grade 4	Nepali
Nigeria	Multiple	MT Grades 1-3 English from Grade 4	English
Pakistan	Multiple	MT and Urdu	Urdu or English

[23] The LoIs listed in this table are those reported to be in use in schools involved in GEC projects. This may not always be aligned with the official language-in-education policies of the relevant countries.

[24] For many GEC countries, there are multiple languages, used by larger (majority) populations and smaller (minority) groups. When referencing mother tongue above, more often than not, the language of instruction is the mother tongue of the majority in a community, and less often, includes the mother tongue of minority groups.

Rwanda	Kinyarwanda	English from Grade 1	English
Sierra Leone	Multiple	MT Grades 1-3 English from Grade 4	English
Somalia	Multiple	Somali	English or Arabic
Tanzania	Multiple	Kiswahili	English
Uganda	Multiple	MT Grades 1-3 English from Grade 4	English
Zambia	Multiple	MT Grades 1-4 English from Grade 5	English
Zimbabwe	Multiple	MT Grades 1-3 English from Grade 4	English

What have GEC projects learned about LoI in girls' education?

Below we highlight some cross-cutting themes in relation to girls' education and LoI, drawing from observations from a variety of GEC projects in different countries.

Language acts as an additional barrier, especially for girls with other disadvantages

Language is not the only barrier that girls face in accessing, continuing and thriving in education, but it is frequently identified amongst the most influential factors. Other barriers include poverty; hunger; high chore burdens at home; lack of home support; distance from school; lack of access to sanitation facilities; lack of access to appropriate learning materials; shortages in trained teachers and female role models; and the attitudinal and physical barriers that lead to the exclusion of girls with disabilities.

Many girls who do not speak the LoI outside of school also face several other barriers to their full participation in schooling. For example, in Sierra Leone, it was noted that girls who speak a different language to the official LoI, English, also had high chore burdens at home that limited the time available for study.

Children with disabilities are at a particular disadvantage. In several country contexts, including Kenya and Rwanda, girls with disabilities are more likely to report not speaking the LoI than their non-disabled peers. In addition to the requirement to communicate in an unfamiliar language, the focus on spoken and written communication also disadvantages students with disabilities, who would benefit from investment in supportive approaches such as sign language, alternative augmented communication, differentiation, large print, Braille and the use of assistive technologies.

The choice of LoI impacts upon learning outcomes

Not speaking the LoI is consistently associated with lower learning outcomes. For example, speaking a minority language for girls in Somalia was associated with learning assessment scores that were 6.8 percentage points lower in literacy and 4.3 percentage points lower in numeracy than majority language speakers. Similarly, in Nepal, it was found that girls' numeracy

scores were higher than their literacy scores and that difficulties with the LoI were the primary factor driving low literacy performance. The difference in the mean score for girls who reported speaking Nepali very well and those who reported only speaking a little Nepali was 8.74 percentage points. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, analysis of learning assessment scores identified three sub-groups of girls who were the most disadvantaged: those who did not speak the LoI; those who reported a disability-related to mental health; and those who came from less economically well-off households.

Language of instruction impacts upon girls' progression and transition

Difficulties with the LoI complicate transition at key educational stages. Projects in many countries observe that girls are not ready to use the official LoI often English, at the transition point. This has been found in countries where a familiar language is used throughout the primary stage (such as Tanzania) and in countries where the transition to English happens partway through primary schooling. It has been suggested by a project in Rwanda that the curriculum expectations concerning language are not aligned with the real abilities of students and that this creates significant challenges for both students and teachers. Language challenges may affect progression for some girls, resulting in dropout between stages. Others who transition to secondary school often fall behind, leading to low learning attainment.

Language of instruction is linked to poor attendance and dropout

Many projects have observed an association between not understanding the LoI and poor school attendance or even dropout. For example, girls who reported understanding the LoI in Ghana attended school 95% of the time. This contrasted with a 75% attendance rate for girls who reported that they did not understand the LoI. Follow-up interviews suggested that poor understanding was associated with lower motivation levels and girls feeling excluded. To address this language challenge, the project hired local language assistants to support their facilitators in delivering additional language classes and after-school clubs. This was found to improve attendance amongst minority language groups.

The number of girls considering dropping out of school varies in different areas and may be related to reported comfort in learning in English. In Ethiopia, girls in Grade 9 listed language difficulties as reasons for dropping out of secondary school. But data also showed that responses varied across districts. In Damot Woide and Damot Sore districts, where more girls reported feeling comfortable learning in English (54.2% and 45.6%, respectively), fewer girls reported that they were actively considering dropping out of school. In the districts of Damot Pulasa and Kinda Koisha, where higher numbers of girls said that they were considering dropping out of school, fewer than 3% of girls reported feeling comfortable learning in English.

Confidence in the LoI is unevenly distributed

The extent to which girls report feeling confident using the LoI differs between countries and within countries. For example, in Nigeria, only a quarter of the girls reported that they could confidently speak to other people in English, compared to two-thirds of girls in Ghana. However, in Kenya, a higher proportion of girls living in the capital city, Nairobi, and surrounding areas reported feeling confident speaking English than in other parts of the country. This means that some girls can access learning and feel included in their school communities more easily than others.

Experiences of the LoI are shaped by differences in teachers' language abilities, attitudes, and teaching practices

There are differences in classroom language practices and the attitudes of teachers and parents to the use of local languages to support understanding in the classroom. While many teachers regularly code-switch between the official LoI and a familiar language to support learning, this is

not universal. In some places, the use of local languages is firmly viewed as contravening school language policy and undermining the acquisition of the LoI. However, this is not the only attitude evident. For example, parents in one project in Ethiopia appreciated the use of local languages in the classroom as a sign of recognising the local culture and community.

In some contexts, teachers' low proficiency levels in the LoI can hinder their ability to support students' language development. Evaluation data from Ghana reported that the ability of a teacher to switch to mother tongue when explaining a point was highly valued by girls. However, even when teachers are fluent in the relevant languages, training on how to transition between the two, and effective techniques for managing different languages in the classroom, is often absent.

Parental attitudes and availability of home support influence students' language abilities

There is significant evidence that positive parental attitudes and parental support and encouragement at home are associated with improved literacy in the LoI. For example, one project working with girls with disabilities in Kenya found that girls who did not speak English, the LoI, were more likely to report that their parents did not ask questions about what they did at school. This was 36.4% of the non-English speaking group, while only 9.3% of girls who were classed as speaking at least some English reported that their parents did not ask questions about school.

Challenges relating to language can lead to social exclusion

Difficulties with the LoI are associated with problems of understanding, curricular exclusion, and experiences of social exclusion. This can be particularly acute for language minority groups learning alongside peers who are more comfortable with the official LoI. For example, in Nepal, Musahar girls experience discrimination from teachers and peers, who see them as uneducable. In Somalia, there are two primary dialects of the Somali language spoken. Af-Mahatiri is the language codified in instructional materials as part of the federal curriculum. Af-Maay speaking girls report difficulties accessing learning and experiences of social discrimination based on their language and lineage. Moreover, data from Kenya suggests that when girls do not feel part of their social environment, this has a negative impact on their self-esteem.

Local language literacy should also be an area of focus

Dominant, global LoI, such as English, are often the focus of concerns about language barriers in education, but neglect of local language literacy can also significantly disadvantage girls. In education systems where local languages are predominantly used in the early years of schooling before the transition to a majority regional or global LoI, developing and retaining local language literacy may become less relevant to girls' academic progress as they move through school. However, projects in some countries, such as Ethiopia, have noted that this becomes a problem when girls leave school because local language literacy is a core skill for girls to access and fully participate in the Ethiopian workforce.

Conclusion

While difficulty with the LoI continues to constrain girls' learning in countries where GEC projects operate, the GEC projects are working with teachers, schools, communities and education authorities to implement strategies to reduce this barrier. Though there are limitations created by educational policies that have been resistant to systemic change, projects have innovated in response to their local contexts and challenges. For example, the Making Ghanaian Girls Great! (MGCubed) project in Ghana, used language assistants, which improved learning outcomes and

attendance of girls who had a minority language as mother tongue[25]. Projects have chosen a wide range of approaches to the problem, from remedial lessons and catch-up classes to address girls' foundational gaps in the LoI to training teachers to integrate flexible language use during lessons. When deployed as part of a broader approach to girls' education that attends to the multiple constraints girls face, many projects have seen improved learning outcomes in the LoI.

Spotlight on the Supporting the Transition of Adolescent Girls through Enhancing Systems (STAGES) project: Ethiopia

Identifying a clear relationship between LoI and attendance, transition and drop-out

The Supporting the Transition of Adolescent Girls through Enhancing Systems (STAGES) project is implemented in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region of Ethiopia, which is the most ethnically and linguistically diverse region in the country. Supported by the GEC from 2017 - 2024 and delivered by Link Education Ethiopia, STAGES works with all primary schools (127) and 17 secondary schools in four districts of the Wolaita Zone. The local Wolaytatto language is the MoI in school for grade 1 - 4 children, before the switch is made to English in grade 5.

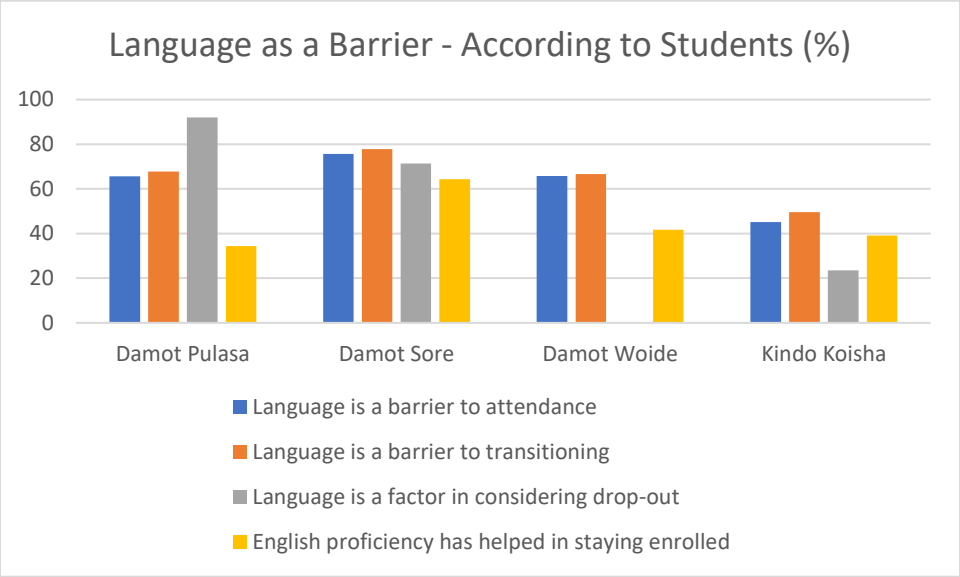
Link Education Ethiopia have provided support over two GEC projects (2014 - present date) to support language and literacy in schools, initially focusing on English language competency for teachers of upper grades. More recently Wolaytatto competency training for teachers of grade 1 - 4 students was added to strengthen students' literacy foundations before switching to English as the MoI.

In 2021 an external midline evaluation of the project was conducted, and the findings related to LoI in schools are particularly interesting[26]. They clearly establish: i) a connection between language and girls' thoughts of dropping out from school; ii) a link between language and attendance; and iii) a relationship between language and girls' transition to the next level of education. Figure 1 highlights the % of students from each woreda (district) who identified language as a barrier to attendance and transition, associated language with thoughts of drop-out, and identified English proficiency as a factor to remaining in school.

[25] https://girlseducationchallenge.org/projects/project/making-ghanaian-girls-great/

[26] This Midline was conducted by external evaluators, School to School International. https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/yleatimj/stages-gect-midline-evaluation.pdf

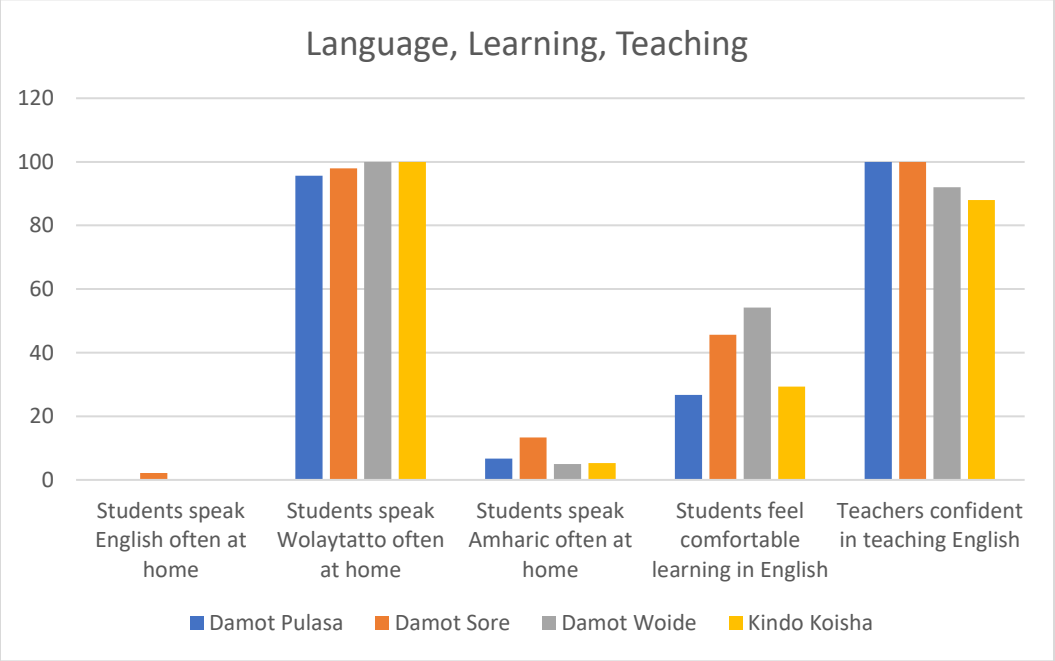
Figure 1



Whilst highlighting linkages, these findings also present an opportunity for further research, especially where they are surprising or where a link can't be established. For example, girls from Kindo Koisha woreda appear to view language as less of a barrier than the other three woredas, and yet Kindo Koisha is the remotest of the four woredas where STAGES is working, where 0% of girls' report using English often in their homes, and less than 30% state feeling comfortable in learning English (see Figure 2). It is also interesting that none of the girls interviewed in Damot Woide woreda perceive language as a factor influencing drop-out, yet almost 40% perceive proficiency in English to be important to remaining in school, and over 60% view language as a barrier to transition and attendance. It will also be helpful to explore in future research why over 90% of girls in Damot Pulasa woreda state language as a factor in considering drop-out compared to 0% in Damot Woide.

Figure 2 demonstrates how the findings above relate to girls' language use in their home and school environments. The majority of STAGES girls speak the local Wolaytatto language at home with almost none speaking English 'often' at home. This can be seen alongside the extent to which students report feeling comfortable learning in English and the extent to which teachers feel confident teaching English.

Figure 2



Additionally, the Midline-1 evaluation findings highlight the intersection between language and other barriers which girls face. For example, it was found that grade 9 girls who reported having thoughts of 'dropping out of school' were: more likely to have lower self-esteem; more likely to have a lower perception of the value of education for girls; and less likely to speak English often at home. For girls in grade 7, thoughts of dropping out of school were linked to a number of factors including: lower self-esteem; lower perceptions of gender (which was connected with whether parents/caregivers will reduce the burden of household chores); and for a very small number of girls from one woreda, being less likely to speak Wolyatatto frequently at home.

The Midline-1 evaluation also asked both male and female teachers to select key barriers to girls' education. Of those interviewed in the sample, 91.04% of male teachers and 70.59% of female teachers' highlight language barriers to be significant. A higher percentage of teachers selected language as a barrier than they did distance to school, lack of water, and lack of latrines for girls (according to male teachers). They also selected it to be of equal importance to school meals, water, and latrines for girls (according to female teachers).

Building on the language and learning work in Link's GEC-1 project in the same four woredas, Midline-1 confirms that there are clear linkages between LoI, attendance, transition, and drop-out and retention, and that language intersects with other barriers that girls face. STAGES intends to deepen this understanding through both internal monitoring data, and the Midline-2 Evaluation this year, as a basis for adaptations in the final three years of the project.

Spotlight on the Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project – Transition (SOMGEP-T) project: Somalia

Addressing the English-language learning plateau

The Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project – Transition (SOMGEP-T) project has been working in the Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug states of Northern-Central Somalia. The project has supported 32,860 marginalised girls by working with 148 primary schools, 51 secondary schools, communities, religious leaders, and the Ministry of Education. It was funded by the GEC from May 2017 to March 2022[27] .

In Northern-Central Somalia, most students do not face challenges with the LoI until secondary level. For all eight years of primary schooling, the LoI is Somali (Af-Mahatiri), which is the mother tongue for the vast majority in these states. In addition, students are exposed to Arabic through Koranic schooling, which many start as early as five years old. This regular practice of decoding and memorising language means that many children already have some relevant skills when they begin to read and write Somali in primary school. At the point of transition to secondary school, however, the official LoI shifts to English. This presents a challenge for students and teachers alike, partly due to the fact that there is little exposure to English outside of the school system. Although English is taught as a subject at primary level in preparation for this shift, the SOMGEP-T project's baseline found that 72% of the grade 6 girls attending rural and remote schools had English skills below the expected level for a grade 2 student. Research by the project has also found that, at the transition to secondary school, although students may make good progress in English initially, supported by the basic literacy skills they have already developed in Somali, this progress stalls as the curriculum demands increase and require more challenging language and interpretation skills. Most teachers, particularly those in rural and remote areas, are poorly equipped to model and teach these more complex skills in English.

The SOMGEP-T project has implemented a wide range of interventions to support marginalised girls, depending on their circumstances. In addition to supporting girls in mainstream schooling, the project has provided an alternative education pathway for adolescent girls who are out-of-school and designed an accelerated learning programme for girls who have been displaced due to the effects of climate change or conflict. In order to address the challenges presented by the use of English as the LoI at secondary level, SOMGEP-T has worked closely with teachers, providing resources, group training focused on language development, ongoing collaborative networks, and classroom-based, personalised coaching. The project has also sought to increase students' exposure to English and opportunities to practise English. They have provided learning materials, including English-language reading books, and equipment, such as tablets and loudspeakers, so that students can engage with digital content and listen to more spoken English. After-school clubs focusing on reading and storytelling have been set up to allow a supportive space for students to practise English outside of lesson time, and systems have been put in place to enable girls to borrow story books to read at home. These additional opportunities for learning English have been particularly important as girls strive to make up for learning lost through COVID-19 school closures.

---

[27] Further information about the SOMGEP-T project, including Baseline and Midline reports: https://girlseducationchallenge.org/projects/project/somali-girls-education-promotion-programme-somgep-t/

There continue to be ongoing challenges, including the impact of prevailing drought on girls' attendance and drop-out, and turnover of teachers who have been trained by the SOMGEP-T project and then moved to other schools. However, the final evaluation indicates that the intervention led to significantly higher gains in English literacy, over and above the comparison group, among girls who were originally out-of-school at the baseline and have subsequently enrolled. Girls who were originally enrolled in SOMGEP-T schools had higher gains than their peers in comparison schools, though the difference was not statistically significant. Girls participating in leadership clubs (Girls' Empowerment Forums) had the highest gains in English literacy in relation to the comparison group – a difference of 4.4 percentage points – highlighting the importance of supportive and collaborative spaces to practise English.

Spotlight on the Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES) project: Somalia

When language intersects with other forms of discrimination

The Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES) project works in the states of Banadir/Mogadishu, Jubaland and South-West Administration in Southern and South-Central Somalia. Supported by the GEC from September 2018 to August 2022, the project aims to support 42,000 of the most marginalised girls, across two cohorts. These girls face multiple barriers to their engagement in education and many are out-of-school. To address the needs of different girls, the AGES project supports enrolment into one of three tracks: Alternative Basic Education; Non-Formal Education; and Formal Education in primary schools[28].

Like North-Central Somalia, in most schools the LoI throughout the primary stage is standard Somali. This language is also known as Af-Mahatiri. However, unlike the northern states, in southern Somalia there is a significant ethnic minority population who speak a different language, Af-Maay. Although there are some schools where teachers are also Af-Maay speakers, and so Af-Maay is used as a language of teaching and learning, all official curriculum materials and textbooks are produced in Af-Mahatiri. The impact of this is that LoI related barriers to learning are already visible for minority language speakers at primary school level.

The AGES project was the first initiative in Somalia to systematically track girls' learning outcomes disaggregated by mother tongue and LoI. Among the first cohort of 24,966 girls enrolled by AGES, 40% spoke Af-Maay (a minority language), and 18% were Af-Maay speakers in a location where it is not commonly used as a LoI. Baseline findings from standardised learning assessments indicated that girls speaking a minority language (mostly Af-Maay) had an average literacy score 12% below the overall average, while their average numeracy score was 5% below the overall average. Girls whose mother tongue differed from the LoI had an average literacy score 47% below the overall average.

These results reflect not only the challenges faced by second language speakers in class, but also a pattern of systematic discrimination. Most Af-Maay speakers not only speak a minority language, but they also belong to ethnic minority groups that have been historically marginalised, most notably the Somali Bantus. The intersection of being an adolescent girl, a minority language speaker and belonging to a marginalised ethnic group is associated with discrimination in the classroom (for example, 29% of the ethnic minority girls affirmed facing

[28] For more information about the AGES project and its full range of activities, see the project's Baseline report: https://girlseducationchallenge.org/projects/project/adolescent-girls-education-in-somalia-ages/

corporal punishment by teachers at the baseline, compared to 21% across the whole sample), and severe poverty.

The project has used a multi-pronged strategy to reduce the learning gap faced by Af-Maay speaking girls. Teachers and non-formal education facilitators were trained in multilingual education strategies and inclusive approaches to classroom management. Community Education Committees (the local equivalent of School Management Committees) were sensitised to the barriers faced by second language speakers and trained to follow up on cases of absenteeism and dropout. Female mentors were identified and trained to form Girls' Empowerment Forums – student groups receiving training on life skills and engaging in peer-to-peer support and girl-led action to address issues they faced. In parallel, the project is working with the Federal and State-level Ministries of Education to highlight the importance of addressing language-related barriers in education.

A remote learning assessment, conducted in July 2020, indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the scores of Af-Maay and Af-Mahatiri speakers. Still, the proportion of students scoring zero in inferential comprehension was higher among Af-Maay speakers (40%) compared to Af-Mahatiri (27%). Among non-formal education students, 81% of the Af-Maay speakers passed the final exams, compared to 88% of the Af-Mahatiri speaking girls, but the pass rates for ethnic minority and non-ethnic minority students were identical (85%). A new round of learning assessments is being conducted in March 2022, but these interim results indicate that, while a language-related learning gap persists, it is closing among the minority students who are second language speakers.

Spotlight on the Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities project: Kenya

Developing a broader understanding of language and communication

The Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities project, led by the organisation, Leonard Cheshire, works with 2,100 girls and 677 boys with disabilities across five sub-counties of the Lake Region of western Kenya. Funded by the GEC between 2017 and 2022, the project has introduced interventions and tracked progress of this large cohort of learners across 50 primary schools, 25 secondary schools and eight vocational training institutions.

The language environment in Kenya includes approximately 67 languages. In this rich, multilingual context, Kiswahili and English are used as official languages. Kiswahili functions as the national language and *lingua franca.* In formal education, the Kenyan language-in-education policy states that the child's first language, either mother tongue (MT) or the language commonly spoken in the school's catchment area, should be used as the LoI in lower primary up until the end of grade 3. Kiswahili and English should be taught as subjects at this level before a transition to use English as the LoI from the fourth year of primary school.

In this project, Leonard Cheshire takes a multi-dimensional approach to supporting learners with disabilities[29]. They work in collaboration with Education Assessment Resource Centres and schools to support screening, identification and assessment of educational needs for children with disabilities. They then support the respective teachers and school management to adapt the teaching and learning environment to ensure that learners access quality, inclusive education. Leonard Cheshire also work with local government and within communities, through

[29] Further information about Leonard Cheshire's approach: https://www.leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/lc-ie-model-policy-report_0.pdf

local leaders, parents and volunteers, to raise awareness around disability, to reduce stigma, discrimination and the social exclusion of children with disabilities, and to make services more accessible and inclusive.

Leonard Cheshire's approach to inclusive education focuses on identifying and addressing barriers to learning, and language and literacy are included as part of a broader picture. For learners in the early years, language can be a challenge right from the start of schooling if they do not share a local language with their teacher and so cannot access learning in their mother tongue or familiar language. From grade 4 onwards, not being able to speak the Lol, English, has been found to be an influential barrier, associated with lower achievement and progress in literacy and numeracy and a decrease in self-esteem over time. However, the project's understanding of language also stretches beyond named, spoken languages, to consider other forms of language, such as sign language and augmentative and alternative communication, as well as provision of learning materials in accessible media such as Braille and easy read. The project works with teachers to understand the full range of diverse language and learning needs in their classrooms and provides training in how to differentiate the curriculum and support learners through appropriate accommodations. By training teachers, the project has managed to ensure that learners with disabilities, particularly in rural and poorly resourced schools, can acquire language skills and participate in classroom interactions using a variety of approaches, depending on the child's needs.

For example:

Rosemary has had a hearing impairment since birth, which has deteriorated as she has got older. Financial difficulties made it hard for the family to afford the right medical care for Rosemary. One day when Rosemary's aunt was taking her to school, they met a GEC-T project officer. The officer explained how the project could support them, and soon afterwards Rosemary was taken for an individual assessment. She received a hearing aid, which greatly improved her participation and learning at school – making a big difference to her interactions with her teachers and classmates[30].

Pauline is a teacher and is one of 75 teachers who have received training in the use of Orbit Readers. An Orbit reader is a low-cost assistive technology that enables conversion between Braille and electronic text. This way, learners can read and write in Braille and notes can then be read by the teacher, who can offer feedback on the learner's work. Following the Orbit Reader training, Pauline has been supporting Marydith to use the technology in class. Marydith has been using the Orbit Reader to learn the letters of the alphabet in Braille. She can also use it to type and delete notes, helping her to participate in class[31].

Recently Leonard Cheshire introduced a creative art project to enable children with disabilities to 'voice' the impact of the project and inclusive education in alternative formats, using drawings, clay modelling, poetry and drama. One group of children both with and without disabilities joined together at Nyasere Primary school to sing a song performed in sign language. The reason the children gave for choosing this song was: *"We did it to show it is all about inclusion as well as to embrace a new language*". One teacher observed how positive the children were, making the song easy to learn. One of the girls without disability said: *"When I grow up, I want to be a sign language interpreter".*

---

[30] Further example of how support from LC has transformed the learning experience of a girl with a hearing impairment: https://leonardcheshire.org/our-impact/stories/vanessas-journey-education

[31] Further information about the Orbit Reader initiative, including why it has been so important during the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.leonardcheshire.org/our-impact/stories/using-technology-create-positive-learning-environments

Spotlight on the Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) project: Sierra Leone

Carefully considering language as empowerment

The Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient (EAGER) project in Sierra Leone provides a programme of learning sessions for marginalised out-of-school girls, integrating literacy, numeracy, financial literacy and life skills. Supported by the GEC from February 2019 – January 2023, this project has reached 26,892 girls from 380 communities across 10 districts of the country.

The language environment of Sierra Leone includes 18 major languages. Although Krio is only spoken as the primary language by 10% of the population, it is widely spoken as a second language and functions as a spoken *lingua franca*[32]. However, many people do not feel comfortable reading and writing Krio and so the country's official language, English, is widely used for these functions. English is also the LoI in formal schooling.

The girls who have taken part in the EAGER project have either never attended school or have had very little engagement with formal education. As a result, they have extremely low levels of English literacy. This is very limiting for their lives, as written English is used for engagement with official institutions, for example opening a bank account or registering for care at a hospital. English is also commonly used for sharing public information, for example important health messaging posters during both the Ebola and COVID-19 pandemics.

The EAGER project has given careful consideration to the language(s) of its programmes and activities. It has been central to the design that the LoI should make the programme accessible and create a space where girls feel safe and empowered to contribute, rather than risk language acting as an additional layer of marginalisation and exclusion. English literacy sessions introduce key vocabulary that is relevant to girls' lives. Before girls practise with words and phrases in English, they first discuss topics and key words in their own languages. They are supported by a Facilitator from their local community to engage with and respond to simple learning materials that use images and stories to prompt discussion. For all components of the learning programme, EAGER Facilitators and Mentors are provided with straight-forward and approachable curricula, written in simple English. Part of their role is then to translate and interpret this into the language and life experiences of the girls. Extensive training and ongoing support is provided to Facilitators and Mentors who meet to discuss the most appropriate ways of doing this. Central to the approach is the use of storytelling. Rather than translate word-by-word from one language to another, Mentors and Facilitators are coached to read and understand the story (in English) ahead of the session and then to tell it in the language they share with the girls. This helps to bring the curriculum materials to life and ensure that they are grounded in relevant, lived experiences. It also makes the content more memorable and supports critical thinking.

Girls report a wide range of benefits from being involved in the EAGER programme[33]. These include the specific literacy and numeracy skills that will enable them to participate more broadly in society. But girls also report feeling higher levels of confidence and self-worth. One girl explained:

---

[32] https://translatorswithoutborders.org/language-data-sierra-leone

[33] The full midline from November 2021: https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/wmspeutm/eager-lngb-midline-evaluation.pdf

"Before I joined the EAGER programme, I never felt safe at all because I had so many limitations. I was thinking that because I never went to school the best, I could ever become was a farmer; I never really knew how important I was as a human being until I joined the EAGER programme. My interaction with friends who had the opportunity to go to school was very limited because whenever they come for holidays, I didn't usually talk with them for fear of being humiliated. Now that the EAGER programme has opened my eyes, I am more confident talking to anybody now regardless of education, or age. At least now I can contribute to every discussion in the community if given the opportunity." (Girl from Koinadugu district).

Chapter three: Further evidence from Tanzania, Ghana and Egypt

Language, shame and silence in Tanzanian secondary classrooms

Laela Adamson

Background

Dr Laela Adamson is an ESRC Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Bath. The findings presented here are drawn from her doctoral research, completed at the UCL Institute of Education. This project took an ethnographic approach to exploring students' experiences of negotiating language in schooling in two secondary schools in the Morogoro Region of Tanzania.

Research summary

In contexts where schooling is delivered through a language of instruction (LoI) that is unfamiliar to learners, it has repeatedly been observed that students are reluctant to speak, passive, or are even silent[34]. This is most commonly attributed to lack of understanding of the language in use in the classroom. Although this is, undoubtedly, an important part of the explanation, the findings from this ethnographic study of students' experiences in two secondary schools in Tanzania show that we must also pay close attention to the socio-emotional context in schools and classrooms. In particular, this research summary focuses on the prevalence of fear and shame in students' experiences of learning, how these emotions contribute to silence, and how the impact of these emotions may be unevenly enacted between and within genders.

In Tanzania, the LoI throughout the seven years of the primary stage in government schools is Kiswahili. Although this is not the home language of all students, for most it is a familiar language because it is widely used as the national language and *lingua franca*. At secondary school, the LoI changes to English. This shift has been described as 'abrupt', has been identified as causing a significant challenge for learners at this important point of transition[35]. Partly due to the difficulties associated with this language shift, there is a growing private primary sector that offers English-medium schooling for those who can afford it.

In classrooms where the LoI is not a familiar language, such as in Tanzanian secondary schools and the many other contexts mentioned in this policy brief, teachers and students are simultaneously engaged in two learning processes. Students are required to both develop skills in an additional language, in this case English, while at the same time learning new subject content in disciplines such as Physics, Maths and History[36]. Research into the use of familiar languages to support these parallel processes has highlighted the importance of talk, both

---

[34] Ouane, A. and Glanz, C. 2011. Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor. A Review and Analysis of Theory and Practice in Mother-Tongue and Bilingual Education in sub-Saharan Africa, Hamburg and Tunis Belvédère: UIL and ADEA. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000212602

[35] Gabrieli, P., Sane, E. and Alphonce, R. 2018. From Access to Quality Secondary Education: Developing Language Supportive Textbooks to Enhance Teaching and Learning of Biology Subject in Tanzania. Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science, 25(1), pp. 1-15. http://41.78.64.25/handle/20.500.12661/3198

[36] Barrett, A. M. and Bainton, D. 2016. Re-interpreting relevant learning: an evaluative framework for secondary education in a global language. *Comparative Education,* 52(3), pp. 392-407. https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/99041302/Barrett_Bainton_2016_author_s_version_post_print.pdf

informal and formal, for both conceptual learning and language development[37]. Where students are silenced or reluctant to talk, they are effectively excluded from both processes[38].

The findings in this research summary are drawn from a wider study of students' experiences and negotiations of language in two secondary schools, one urban and one rural, in the Morogoro Region of Tanzania[39]. A wide range of data collection methods were used, including classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and the writing of fieldnotes, which included records of informal conversations with students and teachers. Students were not specifically asked about negative emotions they experienced in relation to language. Rather, the prevalence of feelings of fear and shame emerged as a recurring theme in students' explanations for their silence or reluctance to speak in lessons.

Both male and female students in this research spoke about negative emotions leading to reluctance to talk and participate in lessons where English was the LoI. For example, it was a boy in Form 4, his fourth and final year of lower-secondary education, at the rural school, who stated:

> ***"So, they break a person's heart…even if you are interested in speaking, you shouldn't speak…because you are afraid."***

Students most frequently spoke about the impact of feelings of fear and shame, often bringing these together and describing a fear relating to anticipation of public shame and humiliation if they made mistakes in English. One girl in Form 2 at the urban school explained that:

> ***"You will be laughed at, which means we are afraid of the shame…fear, again".***

In addition to reports of peer laughter and shaming relating to language, it was also observed that teachers frequently used fear and shame as strategies for classroom control. Corporal punishment was commonly practised and was used as a consequence for students who achieved poor test results or were unable to complete homework. Some teachers were also observed mocking students who were unwilling or unable to answer questions in English.

Although both girls and boys experienced these emotions, there were some patterns noticeable from lesson observations and interviews that suggested that gender influenced the options available to students when responding to feelings of fear and shame[40]. For example, while girls consistently spoke of peer laughter as something to be feared, there were examples of boys deliberately playing the fool and seeking to control the laughter. Talking about some of the boys in her class, one girl in Form 2 at the urban school stated:

> ***"There are some who have already got themselves used to it and they speak on purpose to make the class laugh".***

A boy from the same class explained that laughing at one another was an important part of male friendships, saying:

---

[37] Msimanga, A. and Lelliott, A. 2014. Talking Science in Multilingual Contexts in South Africa: Possibilities and challenges for engagement in learners home languages in high school classrooms. International Journal of Science Education, 36 (7), pp. 1159-83. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258629478_Talking_Science_in_Multilingual_Contexts_in_South_Africa_Possibilities_and_challenges_for_engagement_in_learners_home_languages_in_high_school_classrooms

[38] Vuzo, M. 2010. Exclusion through Language: A Reflection on Classroom Discourse in Tanzanian Secondary Schools. Papers in Education and Development, 29, pp. 14-36. https://journals.udsm.ac.tz/index.php/ped/article/view/1450

[39] Access the full doctoral thesis. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10105810/

[40] There is evidence from different contexts that girls may be more likely to be silenced by negative emotions due to wider societal gender norms (Sane, this policy brief; Ouane and Glanz, 2011).

"…it's every day… so, with that person, you laugh at him, you laugh at one another… this is something a person is used to."

Girls, however, commonly associated laughter from their peers with the use of cruel words and insults, a practice that they labelled, 'gossiping'. One rural girl in her first year of secondary school explained that this behaviour was particularly pervasive if students tried to practise English outside of lessons, stating:

"they say, "Mh! Look at them with English…they pretend they know English…but they don't have anything…they are the same as us…quit using English…make way for us". They are shouting like this…and you don't even speak again…while all you wanted was to learn…"

In addition to some observable differences in how boys and girls responded to, and coped with, feelings of fear and shame relating to language, there were also clear differences between different girls. These differences were most striking in relation to students' abilities in English, which were in turn related to their home socio-economic situation and the availability of out-of-school support for English learning. For example, at the urban school, there were a small number of students in each class who had attended private, English-medium primary schooling and so began secondary schooling more comfortable and confident using English. One female student in town explained that, on the first day of Form 1, several teachers had asked who had attended English-medium primary schools:

"We are raising up the hands…and then teacher say, "good, ok" and is starting teaching, and then he just focus on those people who maybe they are from [English] medium schools." [Student spoke in English].

The fact that these students had a known background in English meant that both teachers and other students relied on them to answer questions and to support others. Their English ability also meant that the risk of making mistakes and being laughed at was significantly reduced. However, these girls still talked about feelings of fear and shame. They also felt they experienced unfair treatment from their peers, who expected those with stronger English to help them with their classwork yet would criticise them if they spoke English outside of lessons. One urban girl lamented that the impact of this was that she could not use English regularly at secondary school, saying:

"I am heart-broken because I am forgetting English".

This contribution has demonstrated the impact of experiences of fear and shame on students' participation in classrooms where English is the LoI. Even from this brief discussion, it can be seen that the silencing role played by these negative emotions has a detrimental impact both on students' opportunities for learning and on their socio-emotional well-being. Patterns have been identified that suggest that some boys may be more resilient to the impact of fear and shame due to gendered behavioural norms. In addition, it has been shown that the impact of these emotions may be experienced differently by different girls, relating to their existing ability in English. Although more research into these patterns is required, these findings indicate that the prevalence of fear and shame in classrooms where English is the LoI works to compound existing gender and socio-economic inequalities in learning.

Recommendations for policy change and research:

- **If we are to fully understand students' experiences of education in contexts where there is an unfamiliar LoI, then we must pay attention to the socio-emotional dimension of those experiences. This will require creating a much more significant space for young people's voices in language-in-education research.**

- **Neither language learning, nor content learning, will be effective or equitable in a classroom environment controlled by fear and shame. Interventions to support language learning must address the socio-emotional context of schooling.**

Language of instruction and achievement of foundational literacy skills for girls and boys in Ghana

Kwame Akyeampong, Emma Carter, Pauline Rose, Ricardo Sabates, Jonathan M.B. Stern

Background

This contribution identifies the links between LoI and foundational literacy skills for girls and boys based on the authors' analysis of Ghana's Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme. This project was commissioned under the CBE Programme, funded by DFID and USAID and managed by the Management Unit (MU) at Crown Agents, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service. The authors, from the Open University, Cambridge University and RTI international worked together on the project between 2017 and 2019[41].

Research summary

The CBE programme aims to provide education to disadvantaged children in Ghana's Northern region, where the largest proportion of children out of school reside. Implemented by civil society organisations with funding from international aid donors and oversight from the government, it provides nine months of accelerated learning in basic literacy and numeracy in 11 local languages for children aged eight to 16. Upon completion of the programme, children are provided with support to enrol in the nearest government primary school. CBE has a strong focus on girls' education in its design, given that there are a number of socio-cultural barriers which prevent many girls from accessing education in the Northern region[42]. We begin by identifying changes in foundational literacy skills during the nine months of the CBE programme for girls and boys when students learn in a local language. We then investigate the implications of skills retention during the transition to formal schools, assessing whether this is influenced by girls' and boys' preference for studying in their own language. We next consider the effects on girls' and boys' literacy of studying in the same or different LoI when students move from CBE to formal schools. We conclude by considering the policy implications of our findings.

Data and methods

Our evaluation of the CBE programme involved tracking a sample of students from the start of the CBE cycle in October 2016 to the end of the cycle in June 2017[43]. We tested 2,002 students in 12 local languages over the nine months of the CBE programme, with a similar number of boys

---

[41] https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/researchprojects/ongoing/complementary-basic-education-ghana/

[42] Casely-Hayford, L. and Hartwell, A. 2010. Reaching the underserved with complementary education: Lessons from Ghana's state and non-state sectors. *Development in Practice*, 20(4–5), pp. 527–539. https://doi.org/10.1080/09614521003763152

[43] Akyeampong, K., Higgins, S., Sabates, R., Rose, P. and Carter, E. 2019. *Understanding Complementary Basic Education in Ghana - Final Impact Evaluation*, Report published by DFID under Development Tracker for Ghana Complementary Basic Education, Crown Copyright: Department for International Development. https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/downloads/Policy%20papers/CBE%20-%20Final%20Impact%20Evaluation%20-%20REAL%20RP_V2.pdf

and girls. Of these, we tracked 1,362 students (52% girls; 48% boys) who made the transition into local government schools and followed them over one academic year. The students took the same literacy assessments at both points in time to allow us to assess progress over time.

Improvements in literacy during the CBE cycle for girls and boys

Following the nine-month CBE programme in one of 12 local languages, the vast majority of students in the CBE programme showed an improvement in their literacy scores, with greater improvements for boys than girls. Mean literacy scores increased by approximately 30 percentage points for boys and 25 percentage points for girls. We further find that the proportion of non-performers (i.e., scoring zero on all literacy tasks) was cut by two-thirds, from 14% for both boys and girls to 3.8% girls and 4.5% boys. This means that, by the end of the programme, the vast majority of both boys and girls could perform at least the basics.

The proportion of pupils who became proficient in literacy overall (as shown by scoring higher than 80% in the assessment) increased substantially, with a greater improvement for boys: from 4.2% for girls and 4.8 % for boys to 21.3% girls and 26.2% boys. This widening literacy gap between boys and girls raises a question of whether there is differential effect for girls' and boys' learning with respect to the language they are taught in, which we turn to below.

Language of instruction preferences and effects on girls' and boys' learning during the transition into formal schools

Following nine months in the CBE programme, the vast majority of graduates transition into primary schools. The language policy in Ghanaian primary schools stipulates that teaching in the first three years of primary education should be in the child's own language. In the fourth year of primary school, the LoI shifts to English, and the local language is taught as a subject. As such, some of those making the transition move to a different LoI. In this section, we focus only on those children who were learning in the same local language both during the CBE programme and after the transition into formal schools. We do this to identify the extent to which these children retain their learning during the three month break before entering formal school. We then look at how this is affected by girls' and boys' language familiarity and/or preference.

We found that a large proportion of students who had attained foundational reading skills during the CBE programme reverted to being non-performers during their time away from school. In other words, they regressed to a point where they could not answer a single item on assessments administered[44]. We found that losses were greater for basic skills, namely letter-sound identification, than they were for more advanced reading skills, namely reading comprehension. Reverting to being non-performers during this period was more pronounced for boys than for girls. Yet, when we introduced the role of LoI preference as reported by the students, the relative magnitude of literacy losses changed. For girls, those who preferred to learn in their own language, those who found the language used by the teacher easier to understand, those who consistently asked for help with work at home, and those with access to learning activities at home. This was not the case for boys.

Continuity of foundational skills and change in LoI

We next investigate whether girls and boys who changed their LoI when they transitioned into formal schools managed to catch up in literacy in the new linguistic environment. Overall, we

[44] Akyeampong, K., Carter, E., Rose, P., Ryan, J. Sabates, R. and Stern, J. 2021. The effects of language preference and home resources on foundational literacy retention during school holiday closures in Ghana: Lessons from the Complementary Basic Education Programme. *Prospects.* https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-021-09590-6

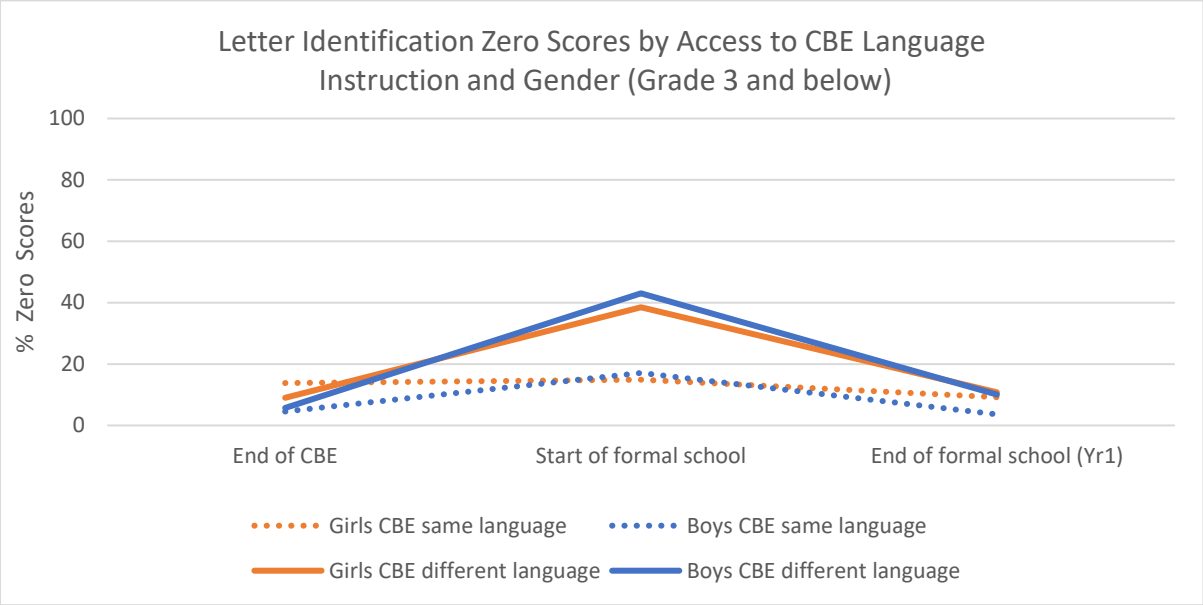
identified that 48% of our sample made a transition into a different LoI in primary schools compared to the language used during their CBE experience (see Table 3).

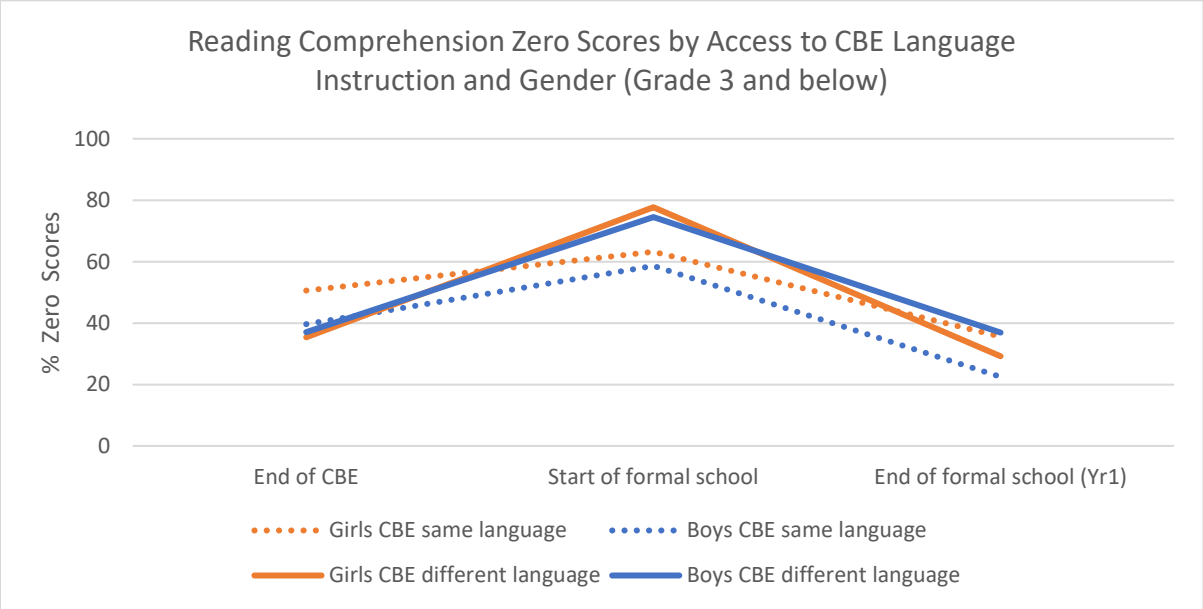
Table 3: Sample of pupils according to grade of transition and LoI, by gender

Scenarios for transition	Females		Males	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Grade 3 and below: Same local language	87	40%	111	41%
Grade 3 and below: Different local language	130	60%	158	59%
Total	217	100%	260	100%
Grade 4 and above: Same local language	242	70%	185	57%
Grade 4 and above: Different local language	115	30%	138	43%
Total	367	100%	323	100%

Those who transitioned into primary grade 3 and below for whom the local language changes faced an initial disadvantage during the transition, with an increase in non-performers at the start of the formal school year. By the end of the first year in formal school, they caught up in letter sound identification as well as in reading comprehension with those who transitioned into the same local language (Figure 3). Patterns were largely similar for girls and boys. These findings suggest that children who transitioned into classrooms where the local LoI differed from that of CBE had developed enough literacy proficiency in their own language before moving into formal schools, such that they were able to continue along a similar trajectory.

Figure 3: Changes in non-performance in literacy in grade 3 and below by LoI for girls and boys





However, girls and boys who transitioned into grade 4 or above for whom the language taught is different from their own language did not manage to close the gap in foundational literacy with those who continued with the same language (Figure 4). By the end of the first year of formal school, a gap between girls and boys emerged: 25% of boys who transitioned into grade 4 and above and into a different local language were found to be non-performers compared to 35% of girls. For reading comprehension, this difference was even greater with 33% of boys being non-performers at this time point compared to 55% of girls.

A plausible explanation for these results is that the shift into English as the LoI is more challenging. This is supported by interviews with students who had graduated from CBE into

formal schools, which revealed that many struggled with the shift into using English as a MoI. This was particularly apparent for those who were unable to supplement their learning with a familiar local language, and was especially pronounced for girls. One lesson observation of a low-performing girl's experience of English Language indicated how she was trying but not succeeding at the assigned task of sentence writing. Thus she:

> ***"Had difficulty doing the tasks assigned. She was talking to herself, and friends, scratches her head with a pencil while attempting a substitution task to write sentences using verbs. She was seen using an eraser having talked to her friend. She put her book on teachers table as if she had finished and was the first to submit her work for which she got 0/7".***

Generally, while all CBE graduates in the government schools expressed frustration, it was notable that low-performing girls felt that their ability to learn was particularly thwarted. For example, one noted that her enthusiasm for reading which she had developed at CBE was not being continued at formal school:

> ***"I can't read now because it is in English and not the local language".***

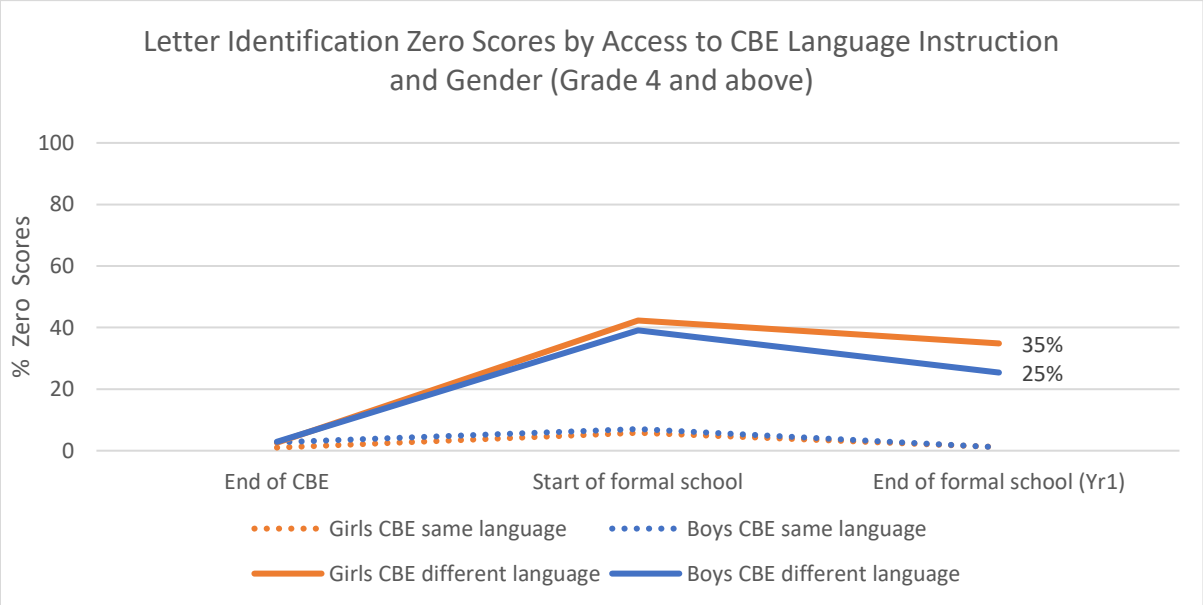
Another articulated deeply rooted frustrations:

> ***"I have difficulty expressing myself in the English Language".***

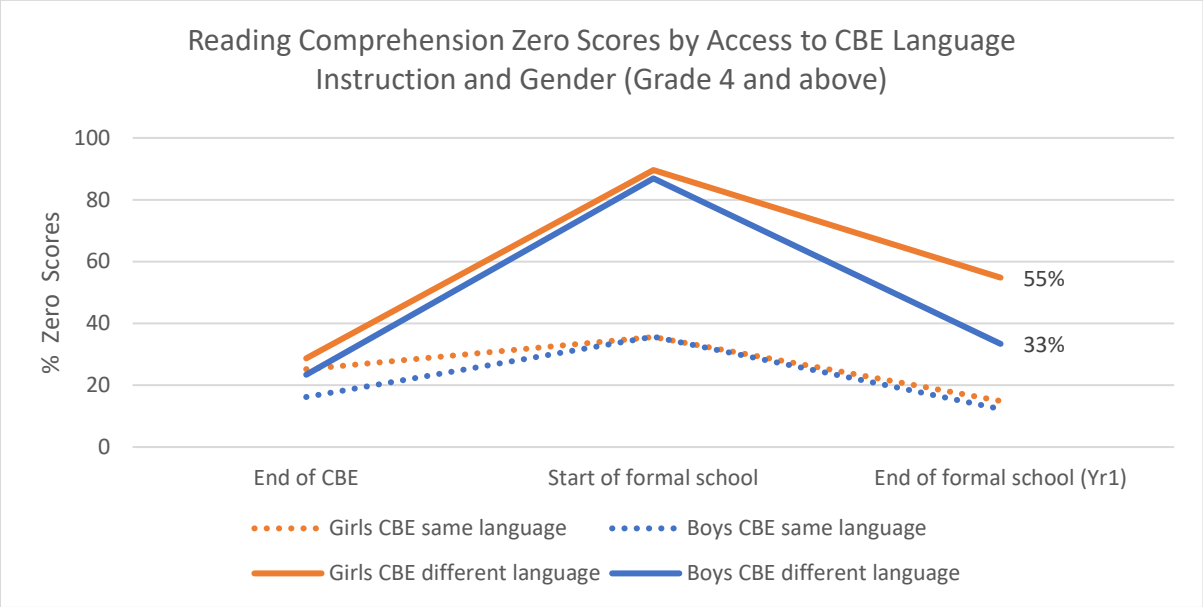
And one lamented that:

> ***"I cannot express myself in class when I am asked a question or answer a question".***

Figure 4: Changes in non-performance in literacy in grade 4 and above by LoI for girls and boys



We further investigate the extent to which initial low performance for girls and boys influences learning trajectories upon transition to formal school. We find some evidence that boys are more able to break out of their initial low performance than girls[45]. Classroom observations suggest that low achieving girls were less engaged in lessons. They were also more likely to be ignored by teachers or easily dismissed when they gave wrong answers. This was in part related to language difficulties: most of them turned to higher achieving girls, to interpret what teachers said in English in their local language.



Recommendations for policy change and research

Our research highlights that schools and teachers must consider the interplay of gender and language within a given cultural setting in order to support girls' learning effectively, specifically:

- **Teacher training should incorporate awareness of gender differences to address the potential widening foundational literacy gap between boys and girls, with particular attention to those facing challenges due to an unfamiliar LoI.**
- **Teacher training for early years schooling should strengthen the capacity of teachers to teach in contexts where there is a diversity of languages within classrooms. While teachers are trained in Ghanaian language skills for teaching at lower primary, this could be combined with greater knowledge of linguistic diversity and multilingual education in classrooms.**
- **Closer on-going monitoring and support of girls who struggle with their learning within both CBE programmes as well as mainstream schooling contexts is needed. One approach could be to offer peer support for low performing girls who are studying in an**

[45] Carter, E., Rose, P., Sabates, R. and Akyeampong, K. 2020. Trapped in low performance? Tracking the learning trajectory of disadvantaged girls and boys in the Complementary Basic Education programme in Ghana. *International Journal of Educational Research.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101541

unfamiliar language in particular, which has sometimes been found to be an effective strategy.

- School assessments should put emphasis on disaggregating data to identify the effects of LoI on literacy for girls and boys.

Gender parity and inequalities in Maasai girls' education: Difficulties of transition to Kiswahili and English languages in primary and secondary education

Eliakimu Sane

Background

Eliakimu Sane is a lecturer in English and Communication Skills at the University of Dodoma. His doctoral research looked at use of geographical and genealogical space in communication in Maasai society. He continues to work in the field of language education, including teaching English as a second language and intergrating language supportive approaches to teaching subject content using English as the LoI[46]. This research summary draws from all of these experiences. Sane attended primary and secondary education in schools located in Maasai communities, Olkokola P. S. and Mukulat S. S. respectively. He has also worked with Support for International Change1 as an HIV/AIDs peer educator and interpreter in Maasai communities.

Research summary

The LoI poses a serious challenge among Maasai children, girls being the most disadvantaged group. The socio-economic ways of living have constrained Maasai in rural settings where they get enough land to graze and cultivate but also have access to bushes and trees for socio-cultural etiquettes. Maasai people depend on livestock keeping and peasant agriculture for subsistence. This way of life and residence enables the Maasai people to have very rare contact with other societies; they have interaction which is limited to a few public servants who serve in their areas including teachers, nurses and local government leaders and those they meet at market places. These officials, however, don't live in Maasai compounds but in houses at designated government compounds or nearby sub-towns. Sane elaborates that, in Maasai, relatives usually live in one compound with many houses and, thus, making their children grow up in a community where they are surrounded by many relatives from whom they learn cultural norms which shape their characteristics as children and future adults[47]. Children also learn to socialise into masculine and feminine future adults. The language of communication in the Maasai compound is predominantly Maasai language. Those who attempt to speak Kiswahili or any other language are called *meeki*; i.e. an outsider who does not know Maasai culture and tradition. Most Maasai would not want to lose their pride by acting ignorant of their culture and tradition.

Children encounter their first language challenge when they enrol in primary education whose LoI is Kiswahili. Maasai language, which is Nilotic has phonology and grammar distinct from Kiswahili. This is contrary to most other societies in Tanzania whose languages are Bantu and, thus, their phonology and grammar largely resemble that of Kiswahili. For example, Kiswahili and English sound like /s/, /v/; and consonant clusters like [nt] are absent in Maasai language. In addition, Maasai's sentence structure is verb-subject order (*elotu etung'ani* and *eshirita ekera*

[46] Implementing language supportive pedagogy in teacher education: An ongoing CIRE research project – CIRE (cire-bristol.com)

[47] Sane, E. 2016. *Space and communication: An ethnolinguistic study of the Maasai of Tanzania,* [Unpublished doctoral thesis], University of Dodoma. Space and communication: An ethnolinguistic study of the Maasai society of Tanzania (costech.or.tz)

i.e. came a person and is crying a child, respectively). During the first years of school, children are shocked by, and struggle to learn, norms of interactions which are quite different from their schema. For example, girls and young boys in Maasai don't initiate greetings but only reply after adults have imitated greetings[48]. While it takes longer for Maasai boys and girls to learn these languages and even learn subjects through the languages, girls learn less due to the societies' socio-cultural norms of interactions. Traditionally, women in the society are assigned roles like domestic chores, milking, cooking, washing, house rehabilitation and cultivation in the fields nearby the home environment. Facial contact between men and girls in Maasai is taboo. The norms of interaction and spatial layout of the house make it impossible for girls to sit together with men and share stories about the world or practise speaking a new language. Girls are taught to observe traditional norms by not arguing with or against men in society. Conversations between girls and men are short, often in terms of command and response with girls narrowing their voice and speed of speaking as a sign of respect before men. Maasai's cultural conceptualisations and values, are that women are to serve men, women are inferior to men, men cannot cook, etc. and tend to assign girls and women traditional duties that are confined to the home environment[49]. These cultural conceptualisations and values, added together with the remoteness of the Maasai areas of residence, give girls another disadvantage to develop language skills, LoI in particular. They are limited in their opportunities to develop new linguistic forms in the LoI stemming from limited freedom of movement and interactions, and chances to encounter new objects and concepts.

Further, girls' proficiency in both Kiswahili and English is limited by constrained access to technical devices like radio, television and smartphones and more knowledgeable others that could provide language input and practice. This is contrary to boys who can access technical devices from friends, male relatives or even buy them with their own money generated from petty jobs and business like rope making, selling chicken and eggs. This difference becomes clearer as we consider Form 4 national results of English subject for three secondary schools located in Monduli District of Arusha Region in Tanzania for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021; i.e. one girls-only public secondary school, one boys-only public secondary school and one girls-only private secondary school. The girls' only public secondary school has had the worst performance in English, 150th out of 227 secondary schools of Arusha Region while the other two schools ranked between 54th and 58th out of the 227 secondary schools. What makes the difference between the two girls' secondary schools mentioned here is not only the resources available in the schools in terms of teachers and materials. The poor performing school is situated in a very rural area while the better performing school is situated at Monduli Town where they have a myriad of linguistic resources to help students learn the LoI. The performance of the boys-only school can be attributed to the freedom of interaction as coached by social norms. Boys are more confident to approach and ask teachers, friends and schooled relatives when they do not understand concepts. They even have more room to practice speaking a new language as defined by the frequency and length of conversations they can make with other people in society than girls can do.

Further, Maasai girls' learning of Kiswahili and English is thwarted by early marriage, which is common in pastoral society, and family chores which temporarily remove them from school. Most men would want to marry their children before they complete primary education (which they complete at the age of 12 – 13). The government, through its country laws, prohibits early marriage, but their enforcement in the marginalised communities like Maasai is challenging. Some notes from the collaboration between the African Initiative Organisation and the Language Supportive Teaching and Textbook Project in 2019 will serve to illustrate this. African Initiative

---

[48] **Ibid.**

[49] **Mtey, A. R. 2017. Maasai girls' education aspirations and socio-cultural constraints: Reflections from Monduli Tanzania. *Mkwawa Journal of Education and Development,* Vol. 1, pp. 1-16.** https://doi.org/10.37759/mjed.2017.1.1.1

sponsored a programme in 2019 to accommodate 42 disadvantaged girls in Monduli District of Arusha in a boarding school soon after they graduated primary education. It aimed to rescue the girls from early marriage, orient them on secondary education and learn, English, the LoI in secondary education. Unfortunately, 17 girls dropped out of the programme, with their whereabouts unknown. The literature available shows that most Maasai girls who drop or miss schools for some days are forced into early marriage and social responsibilities[50]. Government officials and organisations like Pastoral Women Council (PWC) and African Initiatives have been playing their role to re-enrol girls who drop out of school due to early marriage and cultural norms. However, another language challenge faces such girls. The linguistic situation in most parts of Tanzania and particularly rural areas like Maasai community makes teachers the sole providers of the language of input in the LoI. The classroom is the main platform to practise the LoI, and due to the socio-cultural norms in Maasai culture, girls rarely encounter or use English outside of the classroom. Thus, those who miss classes are put at more disadvantages to learn and communicate in the LoI since they have reduced opportunity to practise the language and learn more new language aspects.

Recommendations for policy change and research:

- **Transformations in LoI policy and pedagogy will be needed to address the inequalities and difficulties that Maasai girls face in education.**
- **Language supportive procedures should be introduced, with care taken to ensure that they are culturally specific and acknowledge and address gender differences and inequalities existing in societies.**
- **School programmes and systems should champion equitable, friendly and supportive environments for learning to overcome inequalities in opportunities between boys and girls, particularly in local communities like Maasai.**

Rethinking English as a medium of instruction (EMI) implementation and girls' education: Reflections from experience

Amira Salama

Background

Amira Salama is an academic English and research writing instructor at Nile University, Egypt. She has an MA TESOL from the American University in Cairo with a research focus on teacher leadership and is currently pursuing her PhD in linguistics in Egypt. Amira is the current President of Africa English Language Teachers Association (ELTA)[51]. Her research and professional interests include teacher mentoring, ELT materials development, and teacher leadership. In this contribution, she reflects on the role of English language in her experience of learning and summarises its relevance within the wider evidence base.

Research Summary

My early experience with learning a foreign language was in my primary school in Egypt. My first primary class teacher was a female young teacher who used to teach us all subjects, not only English. My class was all male students except for three girls. I used to sit in the front row with

[50] Pastoral Women Council. 2020. *Annual Report 2020,* Monduli, Arusha: PWC. www.pastoralwomenscouncil.org/uploads/1/0/7/1/10710001/final_annual_report_2020_pages.pdf

[51] https://africaelta.org

two other girls because I felt safe being closer to the teacher. I remember my teacher had to always come closer to hear what I or any of my girlfriends wanted to say. We used to be quiet, sometimes silent, and always obedient, unlike the boys in our class who were always loud and causing trouble. Although boys were the majority in my class, teachers liked me and the other girls more. We used to get higher grades and perform better in exams. However, it was clear that our classroom experience in the English classes was different from that of the boys.

In English as a foreign language classes, Jule (2001) reported that female students are more silent than male students[52]. Using a foreign language in class is reported to be more comfortable for male students than it is for female students[53]. Although not all female students are silent, Fairely (2009) points out that female students do not take their fair share in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context compared to their male counterparts[54]. I liked studying English because of my teacher. She used to be caring but she never asked us to speak, which I liked because I did not want to feel embarrassed making mistakes using English in front of the class and other boys. I could not imagine using English in other classes because my English teacher was my only access to learning it. I could only hear English at school, in that English class. Even in that class, my teacher sometimes used Arabic, our first language (L1), to explain some new words to us. I used to memorise these new words by writing them down every day. We rarely spoke English in class except for drilling and repeating after the teacher, and as a girl, I did not feel the urge to speak in class. My silence was sometimes welcomed and even praised by the teacher.

The recent accelerated interest in implementing English as a medium of instruction (EMI) systems in schools can be attributed to internationalisation and globalisation. It can also be ascribed to the increasing mobility and the impact of the social and economic expansion[55]. This, along with the perceptions of parents who do not speak English, but erroneously think that learning English will give their children an added advantage to have a better future, has incentivised some countries to apply EMI to create an education system that enables students to become competitive in the global market. Accordingly, education reform agendas have increasingly come to focus on implementing EMI in schools in the early education stages. However, with implementing EMI in schools in low or middle-income contexts, such as those in some African countries, issues of inequality have emerged.

In low or middle-income societies where access to education is dependent on social and geographical factors, gender disparities in EMI schools are also evident. In these contexts, girls' education is regarded as a luxury. Some parents of female students may regard girls' education as less important than boys[56]. Educating girls in an EMI system does not only add the burden of being exposed to an unfamiliar language at an early stage, but it also places them in a less advantaged position than boys because of their gender roles. Research shows the need for student adaptation strategies to survive in an EMI system through studying hard, peer study

---

[52] Jule, A. 2001. Speaking silence? A study of linguistic space and girls in an ESL classroom, Paper presented at the annual meeting of TESOL, Vancouver, Canada. ED456666.pdf

[53] Coates, J. 2004. *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language*, Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman.

[54] Fairley, M. J. 2009. De-silencing female voices: The use of controversial debate topics in the EFL classroom, in Wachob, P. (ed.), *Power in the EFL classroom: Critical pedagogy in the Middle East*, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, pp. 55-73.

[55] Dearden, J. 2014. *English as a medium of instruction-a growing global phenomenon*, British Council. e484_emi_-_cover_option_3_final_web.pdf (britishcouncil.org)

[56] Malcolm, H., Wilson, V., Davidson, J. and Kirk, S. 2003. *Absence from school: A study of its causes and effects in seven LEAs*, Department for Education and Skills Research Report RR424, Sherwood Park, UK: National Foundation for Educational Research. Microsoft Word - RR424.doc (ioe.ac.uk)

groups, and strong motivation[57]. The challenge of learning in an EMI system is amplified for girls in less privileged societies who not only lack language proficiency but also cannot have access to these strategies to aid their learning. Girls in these contexts have to help with household chores. They come home after school to cook, clean, and take care of the house to help their mothers. The time a girl spends studying is seen as a waste of time for some parents who see a girl's future only through getting married and staying home to take care of her male siblings. As a result, girls do not have the same access to these adaptation strategies to survive an EMI system. They cannot join study groups because they cannot have the time to do so. Some girls cannot even leave home safely after school. In some contexts, even a girls' walk to school can pose a threat to her safety as she may be abused or be sexually harassed. Once girls reach high school, they are regarded as old enough to get married. Their education becomes a barrier to starting a family. Thus, they leave school to get married, and even with some policies that are being introduced in some African countries to welcome pregnant students back to school, their burden as housewives continues to be a barrier to their education. Gender stereotypes affect girls' motivation not only to navigate their way in an EMI system but to continue their education in the first place.

In addition, in some low-income contexts in Egypt for example, some state schools are language schools that sometimes charge more, but still low, fees to teach subjects in English. In these contexts, many students are not proficient enough in English to appropriately use it as a LoI[58]. Parents of those students do not usually speak English. Research shows that children whose parents cannot support them educationally are less likely to achieve quality EMI[59]. Teachers do not have the necessary training to teach in an EMI system. They may use L1 with no awareness of its effect or knowledge of the code-switching pedagogical practices. As a result of this system, parents in this context, and other similar contexts, who admit their girls into these low-fee "language" schools, may perceive girls' education as less important since they are not able to build and develop the necessary knowledge and skills. Thus, these families can have proof to discredit the benefit of schooling for girls especially if the family is poor or can only afford education for one child in this system. This places girls in these EMI schools at a double disadvantage because they cannot get quality education at these schools and their education is negatively impacted by gender stereotypes.

Recommendations for policy change and research

- **An inclusive education system should take into account the social and cultural burdens that girls face, considering how they may affect their academic engagement and achievement.**
- **Teacher training, particularly in the context of EMI education, should emphasise the importance of encouraging and supporting girls to talk. Girls should not be silenced by language-related challenges and gendered behavioural expectations.**

---

[57] Yang, M., O'Sullivan, P. S., Irby, D. M., Chen, Z., Lin, C. and Lin, C. 2019. Challenges and adaptations in implementing an English-medium medical program: a case study in China. ***BMC medical education***, 19 (1), pp. 1-8. Challenges and adaptations in implementing an English-medium medical program:a case study in China | BMC Medical Education | Full Text (biomedcentral.com)

[58] Alidou, H. and Brock-Utne, B. 2011. Teaching practices - teaching in a familiar language, in Ouane, A. and Glanz, C. (eds.), ***Optimising learning, education and publish in Africa: the language factor. A review and analysis of theory and practice in mother tongue and bilingual education in sub-Saharan Africa***, Hamburg and Tunis Belvédère: UIL/ADEA, pp. 159-186.

Mwinsheikhe, H. M. 2002. Science and the Language Barrier: Using Kiswahili as a Medium of Instruction in Tanzania Secondary Schools as a Strategy of Improving Student Participation and Performance in Science. ***Education in Africa***, Vol. 10, Oslo: University of Oslo, Institute for Educational Research.

[59] Kuchah, K. 2016. English-medium instruction in an English–French bilingual setting: issues of quality and equity in Cameroon. ***Comparative Education***, 52(3), pp. 311-327. TF_Template_Word_Windows_2013 (bath.ac.uk)

Conclusion

This policy brief has brought together evidence from 10 countries that clearly demonstrates that, despite contextual differences, the use of an unfamiliar LoI repeatedly acts as a barrier to quality, equitable education. This has significant implications for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5.

Reading across this wide-ranging evidence, we have identified three key themes that are consistent across the findings:

Key finding one: An unfamiliar LoI affects some girls more than others

It has been very clear that different girls' experiences of language-in-education differ, depending on a range of factors. These include their proficiency in the LoI, the levels of support they have access to in their school and home environment, and the extent to which they carry additional responsibilities, or face other forms of marginalisation.

Key finding two: Importance of classroom practice and the role of teacher

Findings demonstrate that the language of the classroom is not the only factor that affects girls' experiences of learning. The style of pedagogy, the way the classroom atmosphere is managed, and the quality of the relationships between teachers and students also play a significant role in shaping how girls' feel at school and the quality of learning that is possible. However, there is evidence from multiple contexts that the use of an unfamiliar LoI negatively impacts on all these elements of classroom practice.

Key finding three: Language demands intersect with gendered socio-cultural norms

Challenges associated with the use of an unfamiliar LoI are not only experienced by girls. However, across different country and classroom contexts it has been shown that, when girls are subject to gendered behavioural expectations and patterns of interaction, their opportunities for developing both language skills and meaningful understanding of the subject knowledge can be greatly limited.

Considering these overall themes, and the specific implications of the different contributions to this policy brief, we reiterate the following recommendations for policy change:

- **Consider LoI in the design of girls' education initiatives, particularly in the ways that it may be contributing to low learning rates and feelings of social exclusion among those girls most at risk of dropout and poor performance.**

- **Both students and teachers require language-focused support and training:**
    - **Give greater language support to girls as they transition into either an unfamiliar LoI or the educational level when language demands increase (eg at the start of lower secondary education), especially through opportunities for sustained and structured talk;**

    - **Develop teacher training related to pedagogical approaches that support epistemic inclusion for all girls in the classroom;**
    - **Consider not only the language used but also the complexity of that language (eg vocabulary, sentence structure) in girls-focused materials;**
    - **In contexts with high levels of linguistic diversity in local communities, teachers require targeted training and support to enable them to support learning in multilingual classrooms.**

- **Interventions should be underpinned by understanding of classroom and socio-cultural contexts and girls' holistic experiences:**
    - **Pay greater attention to the socio-emotional dimensions of the learning environment, including the quality of relationships, the extent to which students feel socially included, and the presence of negative emotions such as fear and shame;**
    - **Ensure that interventions designed to address equity and quality in classroom learning acknowledge the influence of out-of-school circumstances and experiences on girls' opportunities, including levels of home burdens, availability of material and socio-emotional support, and experiences of gendered norms and expectations;**
    - **Ensure that pedagogical approaches are adapted to local language and socio-cultural contexts and that they address forms of inequality and discrimination that may exist in specific communities.**

We also highlight the following priorities for future research on quality and equitable education, particularly related to language and girls:

- **All projects that gather data relating to students' learning and schooling experiences should explicitly collect information relating to language. Measures of language proficiency and preference should also be incorporated into national and international assessments. Without this we cannot know the full scale of the impact of using an unfamiliar LoI;**
- **There is a need to collect and synthesise language-related data across projects to strengthen the evidence base in relation to the impact of LoI and identify specific concerns for further attention;**
- **There should be a greater role for young people's voices in research about their experiences of education – by centring young people we are better placed to understand the intersections between different parts of their lives, both inside and outside of school;**
- **Prioritise the inclusion of researchers who share both familiar languages and life experiences with those participating in research;**
- **Expand the development of multilingual and language supportive pedagogies that would enable both students' and teachers' full language repertoires to be recognised, utilised and valued in processes of learning.**

Many of the recommendations made above are relevant to both monolingual and multilingual teaching and learning. This is driven largely by the fact that the contributions to this policy brief describe contexts where the official policies enforce use of a sole, unfamiliar LoI, and where use

of a local language to enable understanding is positioned as illicit and as reacting to shortcomings in students' LoI proficiency. However, our final recommendation is underpinned by a strong belief in the value of multilingual classroom practice as a route to: improved pedagogy that supports meaning-making and epistemic inclusion; more positive, collaborative and inclusive classroom environments; and better educational outcomes for all students. Where multilingual approaches are being developed and practiced, the evidence suggests that they do not require sacrificing aspirations for young people to gain access to a global language, but instead support students to develop their knowledge of the new language alongside recognising the language and knowledge resources that students and teachers already possess and bring to the classroom with them[60]. We strongly advocate that a truly equitable and inclusive approach to education would focus on ways that the use of multiple languages and forms of communication could enable young people's meaningful engagement in learning and build upon their wider life experiences, instead of language acting as a barrier and a tool of disconnection between school and home.

---

[60] Erling, E.J., Clegg, J., Rubagumya, C.M. and Reilly, C. 2021. *Multilingual Learning and Language Supportive Pedagogies in Sub-Saharan Africa,* London: Routledge.

Charamba, E. 2021. Learning and language: Towards a reconceptualization of their mutual interdependences in a multilingual science class. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development,* 42(6), pp. 503-521.

Hattingh, A., McKinney, C., Msimanga, A., Probyn, M. and Tyler, R. 2021. Translanguaging in Science Education in South African Classrooms: Challenging Constraining Ideologies for Science Teacher Education, in Jakobsson, A., Nygård Larsson, P. and Karlsson, A. (eds), *Translanguaging in Science Education,* Cham, Switzerland: Springer, pp. 231-256.

Contributors

Chapter one:

Lizzi O. Milligan, Reader in Education, University of Bath

Aline Dorimana, PhD Candidate in Education, University of Rwanda

Aloysie Uwizeyemariya, Lecturer in English for Academic Purposes, University of Rwanda

Alphonse Uworwabayeho, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Rwanda

Kuchah Kuchah, Lecturer in Language Education, University of Leeds

Laela Adamson, ESRC Postdoctoral Fellow in Education, University of Bath

Terra Sprague, Research Associate in Education, University of Bristol

Jean-Marie-Vianney Munyaneza, Gender and Safeguarding Specialist, Education Development Trust

Jean-Pierre Mugiraneza, Leadership for Learning Lead, Education Development Trust

Pui Ki Patricia Kwok, PhD Graduate, University of Cambridge

Chapter two:

The GEC overview and spotlight case-studies are the collaborative result of contributions from GEC staff and staff from project teams and implementing partners, including:

Johanna Arp, International Rescue Committee (EAGER Sierra Leone)

Jennifer Artibello, International Rescue Committee (EAGER Sierra Leone)

Clare Convey, Girls' Education Challenge

Giulia Di Filippantonio, International Rescue Committee (EAGER Sierra Leone)

Nicolò di Marzo, Link Education International (STAGES Ethiopia)

Rachel Gondwe, Leonard Cheshire (Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities, Kenya)

Sandra Graham, Link Education International (STAGES Ethiopia)

Barbara Harvey, Girls' Education Challenge

Fadimata Inorene, CARE USA (SOMGEP-T Somalia)

Samuel Katembo, Leonard Cheshire (Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities, Kenya)

Angela Keenan, Link Education International (STAGES Ethiopia)

Michelle Lewis Sandall, Girls' Education Challenge

Edgar Makona, Leonard Cheshire (Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities, Kenya)

Alicia Mills, Girls' Education Challenge

Abaynew Mulat Alemu, Link Education Ethiopia (STAGES Ethiopia)

Mercy Muthui, Leonard Cheshire (Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities, Kenya)

Lotte Renault, CARE USA (AGES Somalia)

Maheen Qureshi, Girls' Education Challenge

Emma Sarton, Girls' Education Challenge

Marie Schoeman, Leonard Cheshire (Expanding Inclusive Education Strategies for Girls with Disabilities, Kenya)

Chapter three:

Kwame Akyeampong, Professor of International Education and Development, The Open University

Emma Carter, Senior Research Associate, University of Cambridge

Pauline Rose, Professor of International Education, University of Cambridge

Ricardo Sabates, Professor of Education and International Development, University of Cambridge

Jonathan M.B. Stern, Senior Researcher in Education and Evaluation, RTI International

Eliakimu Sane, Lecturer in English and Communication Skills, University of Dodoma, Tanzania

Amira Salama, Academic English Instructor, Nile University, Egypt. President of Africa English Language Teachers Association (ELTA)

We would also like to acknowledge the crucial contribution of all the young people, teachers, parents and guardians who contributed to the research shared in this policy brief.

Dedication:

This policy brief is dedicated to Professor Audrey Msimanga who passed away in 2021. Her research on multilingual education and her ethical approach to research practice have inspired our work, and will continue to do so. She is dearly missed.

References

Adamson, L. 2020. *Negotiating Language and Learning: An ethnographic study of students' experiences in two Tanzanian secondary schools,* [Unpublished doctoral thesis], UCL (University College London). https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10105810/

Adamson, L. 2021. Language of instruction: a question of disconnected capabilities. *Comparative Education,* 57(2), pp. 187-205. http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/242897/2/242897.pdf

Akyeampong, K., Carter, E., Rose, P., Ryan, J. Sabates, R. and Stern, J. 2021. The effects of language preference and home resources on foundational literacy retention during school holiday closures in Ghana: Lessons from the Complementary Basic Education Programme. *Prospects*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-021-09590-6

Akyeampong, K., Higgins, S., Sabates, R., Rose, P. and Carter, E. 2019. *Understanding Complementary Basic Education in Ghana - Final Impact Evaluation*, Report published by DFID under Development Tracker for Ghana Complementary Basic Education, Crown Copyright: DFID. https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/downloads/Policy%20papers/CBE%20-%20Final%20Impact%20Evaluation%20-%20REAL%20RP_V2.pdf

Alidou, H. and Brock-Utne, B. 2011. Teaching practices - teaching in a familiar language, in Ouane, A. and Glanz, C. (eds.), *Optimising learning, education and publish in Africa: the language factor. A review and analysis of theory and practice in mother tongue and bilingual education in sub-Saharan Africa*, Hamburg and Tunis Belvédère: UIL/ADEA, pp. 159-186.

Barrett, A. M. and Bainton, D. 2016. Re-interpreting relevant learning: an evaluative framework for secondary education in a global language. *Comparative Education,* 52(3), pp. 392-407. https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/99041302/Barrett_Bainton_2016_author_s_version_post_print.pdf

Carter, E., Rose, P., Sabates, R. and Akyeampong, K. 2020. Trapped in low performance? Tracking the learning trajectory of disadvantaged girls and boys in the Complementary Basic Education programme in Ghana. *International Journal of Educational Research*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101541

Casely-Hayford, L. and Hartwell, A. 2010. Reaching the underserved with complementary education: Lessons from Ghana's state and non-state sectors. *Development in Practice*, 20(4–5), pp. 527–539. https://doi.org/10.1080/09614521003763152

Charamba, E. 2021. Learning and language: Towards a reconceptualization of their mutual interdependences in a multilingual science class. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development,* 42(6), pp. 503-521.

Coates, J. 2004. *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language*, Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman.

Dearden, J. 2014. *English as a medium of instruction-a growing global phenomenon*, British Council. e484_emi_-_cover_option_3_final_web.pdf (britishcouncil.org)

Fairley, M. J. 2009. De-silencing female voices: The use of controversial debate topics in the EFL classroom, in Wachob, P. (ed.), *Power in the EFL classroom: Critical pedagogy in the Middle East*, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, pp. 55-73.

Erling, E.J., Clegg, J., Rubagumya, C.M. and Reilly, C. 2021. *Multilingual Learning and Language Supportive Pedagogies in Sub-Saharan Africa,* London: Routledge.

Gabrieli, P., Sane, E. and Alphonce, R. 2018. From Access to Quality Secondary Education: Developing Language Supportive Textbooks to Enhance Teaching and Learning of Biology Subject in Tanzania. *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science,* 25(1), pp. 1-15. http://41.78.64.25/handle/20.500.12661/3198

Guzula, X., McKinney, C. and Tyler, R. 2016. Languaging-for-learning: Legitimising translanguaging and enabling multimodal practices in third spaces. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies,* 34 (3), pp. 211-26. https://bua-lit.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Guzula-McKinney-Tyler-2016-Proof.pdf

Hattingh, A., McKinney, C., Msimanga, A., Probyn, M. and Tyler, R. 2021. Translanguaging in Science Education in South African Classrooms: Challenging Constraining Ideologies for Science Teacher Education, in Jakobsson, A., Nygård Larsson, P. and Karlsson, A. (eds), *Translanguaging in Science Education,* Cham, Switzerland: Springer, pp. 231-256.

Jule, A. 2001. Speaking silence? A study of linguistic space and girls in an ESL classroom, Paper presented at the annual meeting of TESOL, Vancouver, Canada. ED456666.pdf

Kiramba, L. K. 2018. Language ideologies and epistemic exclusion. *Language and Education,* 32 (4), pp. 291-312. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1268&context=teachlearnfacpub

Kuchah, K. 2016. English-medium instruction in an English–French bilingual setting: issues of quality and equity in Cameroon. *Comparative Education*, 52(3), pp. 311-327. TF_Template_Word_Windows_2013 (bath.ac.uk)

Kuchah, K., Adamson, L., Uwizemariya, A., Dorimana, A., Uworwabayeho, A. and Milligan, L. In preparation. Silencing in the classroom: Rwandan girls' epistemic exclusion in English Medium secondary education. To be submitted to: *Language and Education*.

Kwok, P.K.P. 2021. *The implementation of learner-centred pedagogy in Rwanda: Teachers as mediators*, [Unpublished doctoral dissertation], University of Cambridge.

Magnarella, P. J., 2000. Comprehending genocide: The case of Rwanda. *Global Bioethics*, 13(1–2), pp. 23–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/11287462.2000.10800754

Malcolm, H., Wilson, V., Davidson, J. and Kirk, S. 2003. *Absence from school: A study of its causes and effects in seven LEAs*, Department for Education and Skills Research Report RR424, Sherwood Park, UK: National Foundation for Educational Research. Microsoft Word - RR424.doc (ioe.ac.uk)

Meink, S., Fraillon, J. and Strietholt, R., 2022. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education: International evidence from the Responses to Educational Disruption Survey (REDS), Paris and Amsterdam: UNESCO and International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380398

Milligan, L. O. 2020. Towards a social and epistemic justice approach for exploring the injustices of English as a Medium of Instruction in basic education. *Education Review*. https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/towards-a-social-and-epistemic-justice-approach-for-exploring-the

Milligan, L., Dorimana, A., Uwizemariya, A., Sprague, T. and Uworwabayeho, A. In preparation. The differential burden of learning in English medium education for Rwandan girls. To be submitted to: *Comparative Education*.

MINEDUC. 2019. *Communique Nº 3582/12.00/2019*, Kigali: Government of Rwanda.

Msimanga, A. and Lelliott, A. 2014. Talking Science in Multilingual Contexts in South Africa: Possibilities and challenges for engagement in learners home languages in high school classrooms. *International Journal of Science Education,* 36 (7), pp. 1159-83. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258629478_Talking_Science_in_Multilingual_Contexts_in_South_Africa_Possibilities_and_challenges_for_engagement_in_learners_home_languages_in_high_school_classrooms

Mtey, A. R. 2017. Maasai girls' education aspirations and socio-cultural constraints: Reflections from Monduli Tanzania. *Mkwawa Journal of Education and Development,* Vol. 1, pp. 1-16. https://doi.org/10.37759/mjed.2017.1.1.1

Mwinsheikhe, H. M. 2002. Science and the Language Barrier: Using Kiswahili as a Medium of Instruction in Tanzania Secondary Schools as a Strategy of Improving Student Participation and Performance in Science. *Education in* Africa, Vol. 10, Oslo: University of Oslo, Institute for Educational Research.

Ouane, A. and Glanz, C. 2011. *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor. A Review and Analysis of Theory and Practice in Mother-Tongue and Bilingual Education in sub-Saharan Africa*, Hamburg and Tunis Belvédère: UIL and ADEA. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000212602

Pastoral Women Council. 2020. *Annual Report 2020,* Monduli, Arusha: PWC. www.pastoralwomenscouncil.org/uploads/1/0/7/1/10710001/final_annual_report_2020_pages.pdf

REB/MINEDUC. 2015. *Competence-based curriculum: summary of curriculum framework pre-primary to upper secondary 2015*, Kigali: Government of Rwanda. curriculum_framework_final_printed-compressed.pdf (wordpress.com)

Rutayisire, J., Kabano, J. and Rubagiza, J., 2004. Redefining Rwanda's Future: The role of curriculum in social reconstruction, in Tawil, S. and Harley, A. (eds.), *Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion*, Geneva: IBE, UNESCO, pp.315-374.

Sane, E. 2016. *Space and communication: An ethnolinguistic study of the Maasai of Tanzania,* [Unpublished doctoral thesis], University of Dodoma. Space and communication: An ethnolinguistic study of the Maasai society of Tanzania (costech.or.tz)

Tao, S. 2018. *UNICEF Think Piece Series: Gender and Equity*, Nairobi: UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office. https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org.esa/files/2018-09/EducationThinkPieces_1_GirlsEducation.pdf

UNESCO. 2016. *If you don't understand, how can you learn?* Policy Paper 24 of Global Education Monitoring Report, Paris: UNESCO. https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/if-you-don%E2%80%99t-understand-how-can-you-learn

UNESCO. 2020. *Global Education Monitoring Report – Gender Report. A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, Paris: UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374514

UNESCO, 2020. UNESCO COVID-19 education response: how many students are at risk of not returning to school? Paris: UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373992

UNESCO, 2021. #HerEducationOurFuture: keeping girls in the picture during and after the COVID-19 crisis; the latest facts on gender equality in education, Paris: UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375707

United Nations. 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, New York: United Nations. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

Unterhalter E., North A., Arnot M., Lloyd C., Moletsane L., Murphy-Graham E., Parkes J. and Saito M. 2014. *Interventions to enhance girls' education and gender equality. Education Rigorous Literature Review*, London: Department for International Development. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a089bae5274a31e0000230/Girls_Education_Literature_Review_2014_Unterhalter.pdf

Uworwabayeho, A., Milligan, L. O. and Kuchah, K. 2021. Mapping the emergence of a gender gap in English in Rwandan primary and secondary schools. *Issues in Educational Research,* 31 (4), pp. 1312-1329. http://www.iier.org.au/iier31/uworwabayeho.pdf

Vuzo, M. 2010. Exclusion through Language: A Reflection on Classroom Discourse in Tanzanian Secondary Schools. *Papers in Education and Development,* 29, pp. 14-36. https://journals.udsm.ac.tz/index.php/ped/article/view/1450

World Bank. 2021. *Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/517851626203470278/pdf/Loud-and-Clear-Effective-Language-of-Instruction-Policies-For-Learning.pdf

World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021. *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery,* Washington D.C., Paris, New York: World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/416991638768297704/pdf/The-State-of-the-Global-Education-Crisis-A-Path-to-Recovery.pdf

Yang, M., O'Sullivan, P. S., Irby, D. M., Chen, Z., Lin, C. and Lin, C. 2019. Challenges and adaptations in implementing an English-medium medical program: a case study in China. *BMC medical education*, 19 (1), pp. 1-8. Challenges and adaptations in implementing an English-medium medical program:a case study in China | BMC Medical Education | Full Text (biomedcentral.com)

Connect with us

Email us
ipr@bath.ac.uk

Find us online
www.bath.ac.uk/ipr

Read our blog
blogs.bath.ac.uk/iprblog

Follow us on Twitter
@UniofBathIPR

Join our mailing list
https://bit.ly/3wTkWQa

Connect with us on LinkedIn
linkedin.com/school/bath-ac-uk-ipr

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

IPR Institute for Policy Research

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.6523434